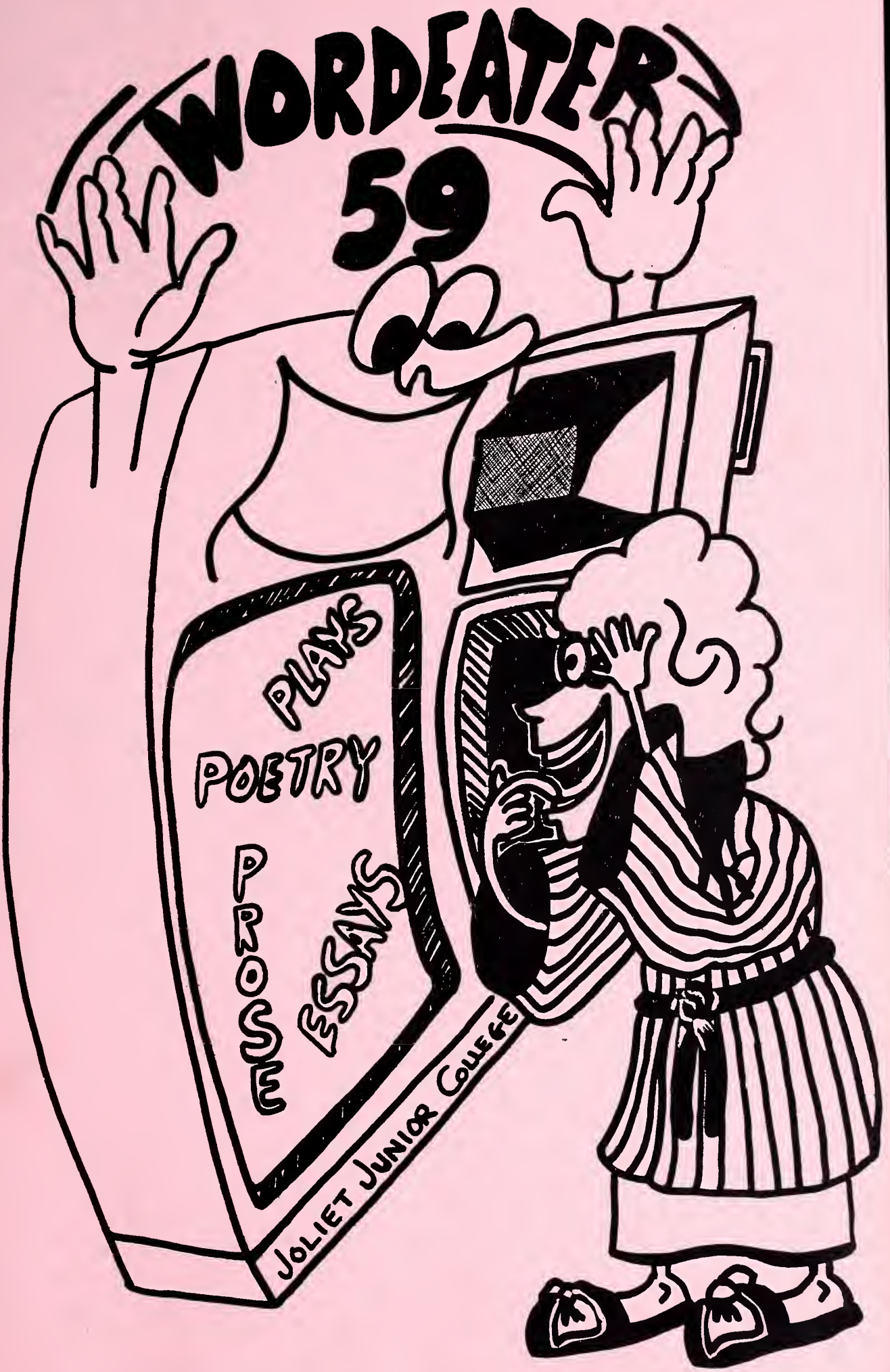
WORDEATER
59
PLAYS
POETRY
PROSE
ESSAYS
JOLIET JUNIOR COLLEGE

WORDEATER 59 STAFF:

Jill Compton, Virginia Fenili, Robin McWilliams, Patricia Shue, Steve Siedler, John Stobart, Michelle Ureche

In order to get a selection published in this issue, four of the above had to vote for acceptance. For the award winners, only John Stobart is responsible.

AWARDS

Ordinarily, WORDEATER awards $25 for prose, $25 for poetry, and $10 each for front and back cover art. Often, these prizes are awarded to single contributors. Since John Stobart felt that several people submitted worthy entries to WORDEATER 59, the prose award, this time, is shared by four individuals, and the poetry award is shared by two, as follows:

•Poetry

$10 to: Steve Siedler
$5 each to: Barbara Pillasch, Sharon Peck, Tony Kocielko

•Prose

$5 each to: Ronna Oldham, Madonna Clarke

•Covers

$20 to Judy Belfield

Manuscripts or cover designs for WORDEATER 60 must be submitted to John Stobart in room C-1069 by:

April 16, 1987

Manuscripts will not be returned and SHOULD BE TYPED.

NEXT DEADLINE:

April 16, 1987

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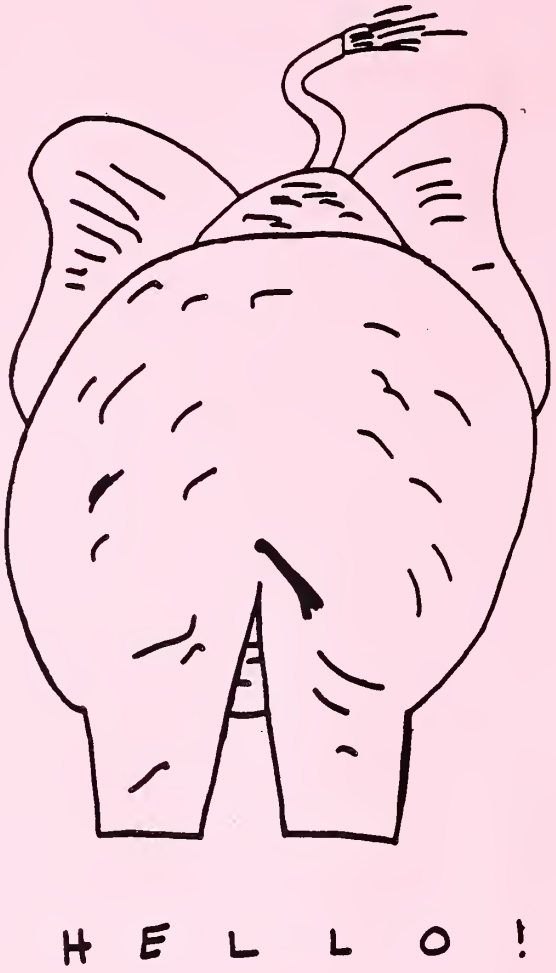
Steve Siedler

HELLO



W. A. Kahle

ONE FALL DAY

Golden autumns
burning up the dawn
chill a whispering spirit
into active movement
floating through the meadow
on a squirrel's cry
while the sun peeks
behind grand greenery.
A leaf falls
with indelible grace
tickling the brows
of one silent witness
one fall day.

****

Joel Stepanek

POEM TO SWEEP BY

Think, boy, think,
You could be the head of the link,
If you could link your think to
A COMPUTER!

Yes, sir.
No, sir.
I really must go, sir.
For I won't link my think to
A COMPUTER.

Think, son, think,
If you could drink,
And sip a risk,
From the knowledge
Of the floppy disk.

Yes, sir.
No, sir.
I really will try, sir.

1100011 110011 1001001

No, sir.
Sorry, sir.
I really must fly, sir.

Sorry, son, sorry,
I didn't do my best.
I let you off easy,
Didn't put you to the test.

Test, sir?
You jest, sir.
A COMPUTER's thought is strange.
One this and zero that,
There doesn't seem to be room in my hat.

Yes, child, yes.
You will not try.
You want everything given,
You want all the best buys.

For this, boy, I can't help you.
No amount of return will help you
In this venture.

You must see it in yourself;
The fire must burn deep.
For, if you find on the shelf
An emptiness, do not weep.

****

Ronna Oldham

A CHILLY AUTUMN

thinking of you
reminds me of some year-old
corsage salvaged from an ill-remembered
homecoming dance.
it is vacant of any color,
dry petals
one
   by
    one, dropping
                off
the

stem

****

Barbara Pillasch

WINTERSCAPE

The icebound river
Creaks and mutters as she shifts
Her winter burden.

****

Judy Belfield

AWAKENING

Pillow ripped
along the dotted line--
ticking under a knifeblade:
the sound and fury
of once-married thoughts
stuffed together
to fill space
otherwise occupied
by the song of idiots
twice-trilled in darkness
at the nights' void.
Few by few
the feathers loosed
in a white ooze
like liquid poured
over a hard sky
then blown away
by gales of empty giggles
laughed by fools . . .
I can feel eternity
from its beginning to its end
as I am stretched along:
an idea unthought,
conjured by a spell
of madness or
memory loss, but then
the difference
is so small
and so am I

****

Ronna Oldham

IN THE HEAVIEST SILENCE

in the heaviest silence,
a wet tear trickled
down her neck,
cold as blood,
and died on her collar,
while the
phonograph needle
rhythmically crackled
its reminder of doom
on the edge
of the record label . . .

****

Barbara Pillasch

CARDINALS

Crimson comets soar
Among snow-laden branches . . .
I long to join them.

****

Barbara Pillasch

DUSK

The neon Schlitz sign
Throws rosy sequins on the
Snow-covered sidewalk.

****

Madonna Clarke

SOMEWHERE IN THE NIGHT

Somewhere in the
night, sails are up
to catch the wind
as it passes by.
A shadow of the
sailboat etched into
the deep, dark blue
water. Moonlight
casts upon a visionary
image of serenity
throughout a peaceful
surrounding. Pity, when
the sun arises to
destroy the scene of
tranquility sought
time and time again.

****

Steve Black

MASTURBATION AND THE
MALE ADOLESCENT

Masturbation can be a very sticky, hands-off subject. No one wants to talk about it. Very few male adolescents ever admit to doing it, unless compelled to for academic reasons or surging, uncontrollable peer pressure. Yet this normal, necessary function is probably one of the most important aspects of a boy's sexual maturation process. A need is present to free this subject from its societal restrictions. The following discourse will be centered on and presented by a male viewpoint. Female masturbation, an equally touchy subject, should be presented through a female viewpoint. (Accordingly, this author feels impotent in expressing fairly the feminine perspective within the confines of a three to five page paper. Hopefully, some ambitious, self-starting female will take it upon herself to explore the area and do a paper on her own.) Enough forethought. Let this free-flowing discussion begin.

There is quite a large glop of information on this subject. Ford defined the term most succinctly by calling masturbation " . . . any sort of bodily stimulation that results in excitation of the genitals. It commonly involves handling, rubbing or mouthing of the sexual organs, or bringing them into contact with some foreign object."[1] The one word that Ford didn't include, but might be considered implied, is deliberate. In other words, accidental stimulation of the genitalia doesn't count. There must be a pre-conceived sexual feeling that the adolescent vents release to by means of activity other than intercourse. (The necessity of deliberation is not an original idea. Kinsey documented it first. Avoidance of another footnote on page one was the prime consideration here. Footnotes can be so messy to an inexperienced typist who has an unsure hand when guiding their placement into a text. One doesn't want to waste all his limited supply of opaque white correction fluid needlessly.)

It is fairly common knowledge that masturbation is the main means of sexual release for adolescents. The reasons for this could be lack of a partner, vis a vis (those French can do it so well) lack of aggressiveness, ability or want in obtaining a partner. For brevity's sake, lack of a partner, for whatever reason, is the primary reason for this activity. Adolescents, just having discovered this source of enjoyable sexual release, are going to do it, again and again and again and (yes) again. They will do it at least until they find a partner. They might continue doing it after they find a partner, but the reasons for that are too extensive and would constitute an entirely different subject and analysis. (Just off the top of his head, this author believes narcissism is a guilty party in that type of discussion. But since it isn't my original idea—someone has had to think of it before me—I don't like it. Back to the topic at hand.)

Kinsey (Footnotes can't be held back any longer. Be prepared for a large puddle of opaque white correction fluid.) reported that " . . . In the present records, the highest-rating males were masturbating with average frequencies of 23 per week in early adolescence. These maximum average frequencies drop

[1]Clennon S. Ford, Patterns of Sexual Behavior, (New York: Harper & Row, 1951), p. 153.

(continued)

to 15 per week by twenty years of age, to 6 per week by fifty years of age, and to once in two weeks at sixty years of age . . . For the active population, average frequencies of masturbation in early adolescence are nearly two and a half (2.4) per week, but a goodly number (17%) of the boys at that age may average four to seven times a week, or oftener . . ."[2] In a nutshell, boys do it, and they do it as much as they can. Kinsey's data is nearly forty years old, but the maxim still works as well today as it did back then.

The techniques of adolescents in masturbation can be overwhelming in quantity and quality. Some can even become downright kinky. Sticking to the protocol of a serious academic thesis, the techniques described in this paper will be narrowed down to manual operation of the penis and moving the penis against an inanimate object. The former is basically self-explanatory. The latter could consist of beds, desks, typewriters, tables, chairs, floors, rugs, cars, sinks, telephone poles; the list is endless. Imagination is the only limitation for the industrious male adolescent self-stimulator. And for the most part, it is a solo sport.

Skolnick has said that, "Most boys learn about masturbation from other boys, rather than discovering it on their own."[3] This author's extensive research has found that most adolescents discover masturbation originally on their own; then possibly, but no more than once or twice, participate in group self-grope sessions. (In the author's opinion, extensive group self-grope sessions would eventually lead to entrance into the closet of homosexuality, another entirely different subject which cannot be backed into in a three to five page paper. This author is not homosexual, nor does he claim to know the homosexual perspective. But he would think that the homosexual response to Skolnick is "no girls allowed.")

The significance of masturbation for the male adolescent is overwhelming and can fill volumes of pages. Most research prior to Kinsey linked masturbation to everything from blindness to total mental insanity. Today, in the post-Kinsey era, masturbation is probably still frowned upon by polite society, grudgingly condoned by moderate, middle-of-the-road society, and completely accepted by free-thinking, progressive society. Kinsey said it best (The last footnote. The suppy of opaque white correction fluid is running dangerously low.) "Millions of boys have lived in continual mental conflict over this problem. For that matter, many a boy still does. Many boys pass through a periodic succession of attempts to stop the habit, inevitable failures in those attempts, consequent periods of remorse, the making of new resolutions--and a new start on the whole cycle. It is difficult to imagine anything better calculated to do permanent damage to the personality of an individual."[4] (Whew. That was a long one. Time for a little rest . . . Okay. All better now.) In other words, guilt is imposed by society, but should be erased for the well-being of the adolescent. It is all right to indulge. Just don't become obsessive (precariously close to another topic entirely). After all, it's more fun with girls.

In summary, male adolescent masturbation can be guilt-ridden, but shouldn't be, for the well-being of the adolescent's psyche. Go ahead, do it. There's nothing to be ashamed of. It's a normal sexual release. What? You think you'll go blind? No . . . no . . . no. Don't worry. Everyone else does it. They might deny it, but don't believe them. It's harder to feel guilty about something if you can admit its existence. (Could this be too philosophical? Not true to the intent of this paper? Indiscriminate rambling in order to fill the fifth page in a three to five page paper? Probably. But the author feels that writing this paper within the confines of his current shopping mall of higher education's available

[2]Alfred C. Kinsey, Sexual Behavior in the Human Male (Philadelphia & London: W. B. Saunders Co., 1949), pp. 506-507

[3]Arlene S. Skolnick, The Psychology of Human Development (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1986), p. 444

[4]Kinsey, Ibid.

(continued)

research material, while at the same time not plagiarizing too extensively what research material he has found, can be analogous to playing with one's self--attending JJC--as opposed to making love with another human being--attending a four-year university. Not to blow his own horn, but this author does have a degree from an accredited four-year state university, therefore feels he has some knowledge, however small, on this subject.

Is this mean? It's not meant to be mean. Just an attempt to inform naive eighteen and nineteen-year-old students that textbooks and instructors of theory are not always in tune with present-day reality. Reading and memorizing something is theoretically sound, but being paid for these abilities is not impossible, but very unlikely, at least in the entry-level job markets. Hands-on experience pays. Don't let any self-serving pseudo-intellectuals tell you otherwise . . . More than enough pompous ranting has been done by this author. Time to zip up this report.) Once you admit it, you'll find that everyone else is relieved just as much as you are; they wanted to admit it, but didn't have the courage. Adolescent masturbation, if not too excessive, (Watch out! Another entirely different subject!) is nothing to worry about. For that matter, post-adolescent masturbation shouldn't be frowned upon, either. Taking that last sentence literally, it's time this paper came to a close . . .

Ford, Clennon S. Patterns of Sexual Behavior, New York: Harper & Row, 1951.

Kinsey, Alfred C. Sexual Behavior in the Human Male, Philadelphia & London: W. B. Saunders, 1949.

Skolnick, Arlene S. The Psychology of Human Development, San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1986.

Judy Belfield

WOLF AT THE DOOR

We laugh
all the blue shades
of April afternoons
as bright as Pacific heaven
over golden verses
embroidered in the earth.
Praise the one
who brings giggles
in straw wheelbarrows,
ladles them out
like water
we cup in our hands;
they trickle through
drop singly
into the grass,
bounce up again
and echo ha-ha's to the distant hills.
We laugh,
repeat the music
of Adam's grandfathers
from the first mornings
to now,
share the moment
when fear is paralyzed
like air in a balloon
just before the pop.

****

Ellen Bryce

STARING EYES

Staring eyes
Chill me to the bone
Insidious feelings
Gnaw at me
Ghostly, claw-like hands
Clutch cold steel fences
Blue-boned skeleton faces
Ask why, with mouths agaping

Listen, listen
Before it's too late
You children of tomorrow
You children laughing
The gentle days are gone
No place to hide
Living hell is ours
Innocence is over

****

Sharon Peck

PASS THE POTATOES
OR
MOTHER KNOWS BEST

I'm afraid that I'm a victim
Of an unexamined dictum.
For when potatoes I must bake
No chances do I dare to take.
My mother often told me,
When, on her lap, she'd hold me.
"You never know what might occur."
(I swear she said this, just ask her)
"Potatoes can explode you see
And what a faux pas that would be
To plan to serve a dinner guest,
Who comes, expecting all the best,
And open up the oven door
To learn you should have baked one more!
So plan that this will not take place
But bake an extra ...just in case."
Now you may find this very strange,
But though I try, I cannot change.
So to this day this rule does govern:
One for each guest and one for the oven.

****

Barbara Pillasch

THE COLLECTORS

I met the Sloans a few days after I moved to Gilton. While working in my antique shop one morning, trying to make order out of chaos, so I could get open for business, I heard a rapping at the window. I opened the door and in marched a large woman of about thirty-five, with the shortest, reddest hair I had ever seen.

"Welcome to the block. Always glad to see another shop open. Mine is on the corner, two doors from you. Jack Lindquist is next door. You'll meet him eventually. The Sloans are across the street. They are nuts. I'm Bonnie."

"Nice of you to come over. My name is Louise. What do you mean, they're nuts?"

"You'll see. This place is a mess," she said, pushing at an empty box with her foot. "Come on, take a break. I'll introduce you to them."

As we crossed the street, she told me, "He's a retired army man, or something, gets a decent pension, I hear. Don't think Mrs. has been feeling too well lately." We reached the door and she opened it, holding it for me. As I entered, she said, "Brace yourself."

I noticed the odor first. Mustiness pervaded the huge building like something alive, creeping into my nose and throat. I sneezed. My eyes adjusted slowly to the dimness inside after the July sunshine. The first thing I saw was a monstrous picture of a stalking tiger, painted on black velvet in shades of orange and gold. It appeared to be irridescent. That will glow in the dark, I thought. Looking arour I saw an enormous high-ceilinged room that seemed to go all the way back to infinity.

The room was packed from floor to rafters with an incredible array of things. Not angiques. Things. Every inch of wall space was covered with shelves or pictures. Shelves full of books, shelves full of planters, the kind you pick up at garage sales for ten cents, mostly plastic. Shelves were jammed with fruit jars, crammed with lamps, lamp bases, lamp parts, lamp shades. Shelf after shelf held old and not-so-old, tarnished silverplate trays, sugars and creamers, candle holders, teapots, coffee pots, most of them dented, the silver worn off. Shelves brimmed with Tupperware, old dishes. There were yards of shelves full of children's toys, not old enough to be collectible, just used and battered, lying on the shelves like forgotten memories.

Any space not holding a shelf was occupied by a picture. Pictures of every size and description, frames broken, crumbling. I saw artificial Christmas trees, stands, ornaments, a few dried-up plants, what seemed like miles of old tools, and a bird's nest. And more books.

Most astounding of all was the fact that this room, with its gigantic volume of junk, was incredibly neat and clean. Each item rested in its place, lovingly organized, classified, arranged, and hung. A few pieces of used furniture stood around decrepit, forlorn.

Along the north wall, precisely in the center, was an area, about ten feet by six feet, which held a small weary-looking sofa. A large, round wooden table with a sawed-off base served as a coffee table, which sat on a clean, but worn Oriental rug. An electric coffee pot was perking cheerfully. There were a few dishes and a box from the bakery, next

(continued)

door. On the sofa sat a tiny, elderly couple.

They rose and walked toward us. Bonnie said, "Hey, you two, this is Louise, the new antique dealer from across the street." To me, "This is Bill and Ellen Sloan. Oh, damn! Someone just went into my shop. See you later." We watched her hurry across the street, her red cap of hair bobbing and gleaming in the sun.

I turned back to the Sloans and saw two very fragile, very old people smiling up at me. They were exactly the same size. I was sure, if put on a scale, they would weigh exactly the same. The similarity ended there. Mr. Sloan's full head of black hair was obviously a wig. His dark eyes, in a taut, angular face darted continually, seeming curiously tired and sad at the same time. His fragile-looking body arched like a bow, but he moved with surprising agility.

His wife was a pale wraith with soft white hair that lay in waves around her thin, once-pretty face. She was so unsteady and looked so frail that I had to restrain myself from taking her arm.

Before we could say anything, the door opened. A young man entered, looked startled, then began to browse, trying to appear nonchalant. Mr. Sloan hurried over to him and began to trail him around the shop. Every time the man picked something up, Mr. Sloan snapped, "Be careful!" The man picked up a lamp base, checked the price tag, and with an incredulous expression, put it back. "Careful, careful! You browsers. I'm going to start charging you guys one dollar for admission. You think this is a museum, or what?" I admired the young man's restraint as he silently headed for the door. As he shot past us, Mrs. Sloan chirped gaily, "You come back soon, you hear?"

"Well, I really have to be going," I said. "It was very nice meeting you." I <u>needed</u> to get out of there. That smell. It must have been from all of the old books. I sneezed again.

"Sit down, sit down," commanded Mr. Sloan. "Have some coffee. Lock the door, Ellen. I've had enough of browsers." As she started for the door, he said, "Never mind, I'll get the door. You go sit down, too." His voice became gentle when he spoke to her.

"How can you sell anything if you don't let people browse?" I asked, timidly.

"Can't be bothered," his voice harsh again. "People want everything for nothing. I'd rather keep it."

"Coffee?" Mrs. Sloan smiled up at me.

"I really do have to run, Mrs. Sloan."

"Well. Come again soon, dear. I'll show you our collections."

"I will," I promised, and made my getaway.

As the months passed, I came to know the Sloans quite well. That they were eccentric, there was no doubt. The sign in front of their shop read, "Antiques," but an antique rarely appeared. They just bought things. Anything. I frequently attended auctions, hoping to find merchandise for my shop. I often ran into them at these sales. They bought everything that nobody else wanted if it didn't cost more than one dollar.

"This whole box of goodies for two dollars, folks. Two dollars! Do I hear <u>one</u> dollar?" the exasperated auctioneer would shout. "You folks are missing the boat!"

"Fifty cents," Mr. Sloan would say.

"Sold! Fifty cents!" Box after box full of old rusty cookie tins, light bulbs, empty cigar boxes; things that should have been trashed before the auction began. When Mrs. Sloan became tired, her husband would load their treasures into their station wagon, haul them to their shop, where they would be sorted, labled, and over-priced.

I often found them rummaging through their precious boxes, exclaiming delightedly at each item. "Oh, look, Bill, an old pair of eyeglasses to add to our collection." Or, "A birdhouse! We don't have one of these. Let's start a collection."

I visited the Sloans often, once I got used to the mustiness of the shop. I grew fond of them. Mrs. Sloan was consistently pleasant, although lately she was becoming more and more detached and vague. Mr. Sloan was an extremely private man, and as long as I respected that, we got along fine. I was touched by his gentle kindness to his failing

(continued)

wife. I worried about them. They seemed so . . . breakable.

It didn't take me long to realize that they did not want to sell anything. They never admitted this, probably not even to themselves. The antique shop was just a rationale. Occasionally some neophyte wandered in and bought something, in spite of Mr. Sloan's rudeness, thinking that because he was in an antique shop, the item must have been an antique. Mr. Sloan would sell the item, grudgingly, then close the shop for the rest of the day, complaining, "I have work to do. I can't get organized with all these browsers in my way."

It was not unusual for their station wagon to be parked in front of their shop, and the "Closed" sign to be on the door all day. I pictured them in there, sorting, sorting. They began to spend more time there, often late into the evening, as though reluctant to leave collections.

I noticed, as time passed, that Mr. Sloan was looking increasingly tired and worried. I checked on them every day, sometimes using the key that I had browbeat them into giving me. Mrs. Sloan had retreated further into her own world, spending most of her day on the sofa. She smiled, still, whenever we were able to capture her attention. Mr. Sloan stopped going to auctions. There were still dozens of boxes to be unpacked, however. He would drag a box over to her, kneel and pull things out for her to see. "Another bottle opener, Ellen! Here, look at this. For your basket collection," holding up a broken, bedraggled Easter basket with a tattered pink bow on the handle. I watched them, wondering, How do they find each other, these people?

Sometimes Mrs. Sloan would laugh and reach for the treasure. More often, she would seem to tear her eyes from some inner scene--where was she?--and look at her husband with vacant eyes. Smiling absently, she would return to wherever she had been pulled from. At these times he would gaze at her, his eyes no longer darting; just black pools of grief.

One day, I found him coaxing her to eat. Tenderly he begged her. "No." She pushed the fork away. I tried, not for the first time, to talk to him about her. "I'm taking care of her."

"I'm worried about you. You look so exhausted."

"Don't worry." He turned away, dismissing me.

"She should be in bed."

"She cries when I make her stay in bed. She's afraid I'll leave her. She says she wants to be with our things. It perks her up to come here. For a while. Me too. Everything we own is here. We need to be here."

I looked around at the collections. How many years of accumulating had there been before they had decided to haul it all to this building, so that they could continue to add to it? How long had it taken them?

Dear God, I thought. I should do something. I didn't know what to do. "You have got to do something," I said. What?

"I know."

I left him, his back to me, bending over his wife, stroking her hair, murmuring to her.

That had been the day before. I went to bed. I managed to sink into a half-sleep. I lay there, the humming of the furnace soothing me. Each time it shut off, I rose out of sleep, listening, waiting for it to start again. Thoughts of the Sloans drifted in and out of my consciousness.

Not having seen their car that day, I had assumed that they had stayed home becau of the extreme cold; yet I had seen a light. It hadn't registered until later. Something bothered me. So what, so they forgot to turn their light off, I told myself. I fell asleep at last.

Sunshine nudged me awake. Thoughts of the Sloans stirring as though they had never stopped. Maybe they parked in the back of their shop. Why would they do that? Stop it. Something. As I dressed, Something pulled at me, tangible, like annoying fingers, picking, prodding, plucking. I looked at the thermometer outside my bedroom window. Twenty-three degrees below zero. "I <u>hate</u> this!" I exclaimed out loud.

"Awwk!" said Fred, from the living room.

(continued)

Heading for the front window, I absently yanked the cover from his cage as I went by, startling him so he teetered on his perch.

"Good morning, Fred," I grumbled.

"Good morning, Fred," he said.

I looked out of the window and immediately felt the sensation I had experienced the evening before, the sense that the world had stopped. I felt lightheaded. The aged storefronts shimmered out of focus in the sunshine. As though propelled, I bundled up, feeling silly, feeling panic creep up my body like sucking quicksand, encasing my legs and arms, turning them into leaden weights.

I stepped into the sunshine. I didn't feel the cold. I walked to the shop across the street in that brilliant, sly, lethal cold that I didn't feel. I unlocked the door and stepped inside. I felt the cold, then, deep as doom. In the bright light, I saw them, lying together on the sofa, released, in a frozen embrace.

An hour later I came home, walked around the house and through the back yard to the sun-drenched river. I stood there awhile, listening to it creak and mutter as it shifted its winter burden. When I turned away, I saw the dog. He was standing near the empty dish, head up, watching me. I went toward him. He didn't move. I walked past him to the house to get his food. Slowly, he followed me.

****

Joel Stepanek

DINOSAUR

Great big lizard
Millions of years
Real big gizzard
Little tiny ears
Great big lizard

Not real smart
Lasted real long
Never knew Jarts
Never had Pong
Not real smart

How did you end?
Never had smoking
Never had the bends
It could end in choking
How did you end?

Will we follow your fate?
Did you get someone mad?
Did mom yell because you were late?
Did Commies make you sad?
Will we follow your fate?

****

W. A. Kahle

EXPLORING THE COSMIC

Kinetic forces
slicing apart the sky
a trillion megawatts growling
a power-starved madness
as the rain falls.

Black, heinous clouds
floating in defiance
spit in sopping release
to quench the scorched earth
lusting for the favor implied.

Unleased winds
ravaging the west
will gain momentum--
to take the unguarded down
with a simpleton's whimper.

On star-filled nights
the peaceful seconds are waiting
like a centenarian's grace
to let each aeon evenly pass . . .
into a single, mammoth text.

If a tear falls
on a lonely face today,
or tomorrow, or next year,
one may wish to view it--
if they have the patience.

****

AT THE SOUND OF THE BEEP

MONDAY

Hi. This is 5271 and Bill's not home right now. If you leave your name and number he'll return your call. BEEP.

Hey, this is Ken. What a boring message. Do something more creative next time. Remember, you're in the big city now. Why don't you try to get a date with Linda, the good-looking receptionist at work. Then I'll try and get a date and we can double. Tell me if you get lucky by Wednesday.

Bill, this is your mother calling. Where are you? It's 8:30 and you should be home from work by now. If you want me to, I can take a train up to the city this weekend, straighten up your apartment and do some laundry. Call me back. I love you.

TUESDAY

(Hawaiian music is in the background) Hi. This is Bill and I'm not home right now because I'm touring the islands. Just leave your message after the BEEP.

Hi. It's Linda calling and I hope you're not really gone on vacation because I can go on Friday night. Mexican food sounds great too. I also picked up something real special to wear. See you at work.

It's your mother again. I hope it's a joke about the vacation. You're such a kidder. Why haven't you called me back? The past few weeks the house seems so empty without you. Call me back whatever time you get home and you can tell me all about work. I love you.

TUESDAY

You have reached Ken's answering machine which takes over for him when he leaves reality. Just leave your name and bra size at the BEEP

I'm a size 44D and your masculinity makes me hot and this is a prank. Ha.

Bill, here. Linda called a little while ago and left a message on my machine. Her voice really did things to my libido. How's Friday night at 7:00?

WEDNESDAY

You have reached Bill's Bachelor Pad and if it's Linda say something sexy.

Bill, this is your mother, and who's Linda. In my day, nice girls didn't call boys. It's not proper. I'm sorry I can't visit you this weekend because you have to work Friday night. I think your boss is giving you too many hours. Maybe I should call him and tell him you need some time off. The dog has been wandering around the house looking for you. I also thought of you and mailed you some cookies. Call me if you're not BEEP.

THURSDAY

(Music is heard) Who are you . . . wh who . . . who, who?

Ken, this is Bill. I'm not too sure I did the right thing about lying to my mom. I never did that before. Well, I'm heading out to the health club. See you.

THURSDAY

You have reached 5271 and at the sound of the beep leave your name and number. BEEP.

Hello, William. This is Dr. Emery and I thought I should notify you that your mother injured herself by falling down the stairs. She can't get around the house because her back hurts. She suggested I call you and tell you about her condition and hint to you to come home this weekend.

FRIDAY

Thank God, it's Friday. If you share that belief just give old Ken your name and number and maybe we can go party tonight. BEEP.

Ken, you're going to kill me. I have to go back home and get my mom all situated because she hurt herself. Could you please break the news to Linda. I have to go catch a train.

(continued)

Hi. This is Commonwealth Edison and we'd like to know if your refrigerator is running. If it is, we suggest you go catch it. Ha!

SATURDAY

You have reached 5271 and at the sound of the beep, leave your name and number. BEEP.

I hope you don't mind, buddy, but I took out Linda last night. We have a lot in common. I hope you're not too mad. I got to run. I have to pick her up in a half hour. She looked great last night. Chow.

MONDAY

You have reached 5271, and at the sound of the beep, leave your name and number. BEEP.

Now, that's a real nice message to have on your machine. I think you should keep it that way. Girls won't get the wrong idea about my son. Thanks for coming up to help me this weekend. You're my good boy. I love you.

I was glad to see you back at work. Linda and I were talking at lunch and she has a friend she could fix you up with this weekend. That's if you're not running an errand for your mother or something. I won't be at work tomorrow because I'm going shopping for some new clothes. Adios.

TUESDAY

Ken is out right now running up his Visa bill. If you'd like to make a donation to the cause, leave your name and credit card number after the BEEP.

Go ahead and fix me up with the girl and she'd better be good-looking. I'm going to work out. See ya.

(Heavy breathing) I want you. I want you. I want you. Ha!

WEDNESDAY

You have reached 5271, and at the sound of the beep, leave your name and number. BEEP.

I know you said you can't come home for awhile, but I had to fire that nurse. She was always telling me what to do. Maybe you can take the train home after work on Friday. It won't take you too long to find someone else. I love you.

THURSDAY

I have a tracer on this phone and the next prank call I get, I will find you, and I will kill you. If you're a friend, leave your name and number. BEEP.

Having some troubles with weirdos, Ken? This girl I'm going out with tomorrow better be good. I'm feeling really guilty. I had to say no to my mother. I'm standing by my decision. See you at work.

Sorry, I'm calling back again. Aren't you ever home? What time did you say we were leaving tomorrow? Wasn't it right after work? I guess I bring a change of clothes then.

FRIDAY

You have reached 5271, and at the sound of the beep, leave your name and number.

Billy, if you're there, please pick up. I'm real lonely and my back hurts. The house is so empty and quiet. The neighbor came over today and made me some casseroles. I hate depending on people. If you lived here, I wouldn't have to owrry. You could find a job like yours near home. If you get home early BEEP.

SATURDAY

You have reached 5271, and at the sound of the beep, leave your name and number. BEEP.

William, this is Dr. Emery. I felt it was important to call and tell you that your mother has had a nervous breakdown. She's in Memorial Hospital.

MONDAY

You have reached 5271, and at the sound of the beep, leave your name and number. BEEP.

Bill, this is Ken. Where were you at work. Did that girl tire you out this weekend? Call me back.

(continued)

TUESDAY

You have reached 5271, and at the sound of the beep, leave your name and number. BEEP.

Come on, Bill, if you are there, pick up . . . I'm worried about you. Call me. OK?

WEDNESDAY

The number you have reached, 5-2-701, has been disconnected.

****

Steve Siedler

PLAYFUL

"Excuse me, what does it take to get some service around here?" a large woman boomed.

Better legs and a short skirt would help. "I'm sorry. How can I help you?" I asked politely. My God! Obviously the illness had spread to a point that I knew I couldn't help her at all.

"These shoes were a gift, and they don't fit." She shoved a bag at me. Bull. You bought 'em for one night and are returning them because you know that your husband will never take you out in public again. "Well, let's take a look here." I carefully extracted the shoes from a J. C. Penney bag, not even a box. I looked at the style and read the label. Receipt? Of course not.

"Madame?" I asked.

"Yes," she answered.

No doubt with legs like those she obviously couldn't work the streets any more. "I'm sorry, but this store doesn't carry this brand." Basically because it was a shitty brand, and the uppers were plastic.

"My husband bought them here. He told me to ask for the older man, the manager, I think."

I am the manager. "Oh, maybe it was Jim. Did he have a beard?"

"Yes, I think so. My husband said that the man told him that he could bring them back if they didn't fit."

Bob, the only other employee, was twenty, and baby-faced. "I'm really sorry, but we don't carry this brand." I wasn't sorry in the least. "Your husband must be mistaken about the store name."

"No, he wasn't. You had this shoe here last month," she stated confidently. "Let me speak to the older man."

"I'm sorry, but I'm the oldest employee here, and we did not have this brand last month." Or last year, or ever.

"I don't like your attitude. Let me speak to the manager, now!" she demanded.

You have been, Stupid. See, it says so right on the name tag. "I am the manager, and we do not carry this brand of shoe. If you can find a receipt or a box, the store name should be on it."

"I told you, they were a gift," she snapped. I pitied the man that was forced, by tradition, to buy gifts for this woman.

"I'm sorry, but since we don't carry the brand, there's really not much I can do for you."

"So what am I supposed to do with them?" Obviously becoming upset.

Stick them between your thighs and start walking. I bet you could get five miles before they fall out. "I would talk to your husband again about the store name."

"Well, I'll let you talk to him about that." she pouted. "What is your name?"

Oh, thank you for the privilege.

"Steve. Have a nice day."

I watched her waddle out, then turned and walked slowly into the stock room, adding a chalk mark to several already on a small chalk board with the day's date on it. I turned up the volume on the boom box, then spun around twice, arriving back behind the counter.

I kept a loaded squirt gun next to the stapler. I paused, then quickly grabbed the gun and shot a quick burst at a target strategically placed especially for that purpose. The target

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was a small plastic card with the head of a gorilla on it, complete with glaring, blood-shot eyes. The caption read, "Patience, my ass. I'm gonna kill something!" I zapped him in the forehead, then walked back to the chalkboard and placed an X through the latest addition. Ten for ten, not bad, eh?

She was history, just like the kid who entered the store with popcorn, then left casually when he dumped it in the Reebok display, the old man who smeared the entire front display window with prints from a hand covered with an unknown brown substance, and the freight driver who tried to quick-talk me into signing for a shipment that was four cases short. The elderly woman who had tried on every size six in the place even though she was at least a seven and a half was up on that board, along with the man returning a pair of Frye boots with two inches of toe neatly chopped off, sole and upper, and the well-dressed young lady who had implied both that I was not particularly bright, and that I was looking up her dress. I thought about her for a moment, then erased her mark. She had been half right. But the others were gone. Poof! Off the face of the earth. Vaporized.

I had only shot the gorilla for some of them. The others had met their demise via Bob's suction-cup dart gun, shot directly into the face of Fred, the three-foot tall stuffed bum sitting in a corner of the stock room. Fred had a plastic face, and when the suction cups were a little wet, they really hung onto old Fred's face. Fred had taken a double shot because of the man who had spouted for a half-hour about how he could never smile and be courteous to the public day after day. Of course, he didn't know about the methods and devices that we used to maintain that smile.

There was even a faceless X on the board. At 9:30 a.m., a man had called and asked, "How would you like to get your dick sucked?" It had been early. All I had come up with was, "Not by you, but what's your mother look like?"

Yep, ten for ten, not bad. I checked my watch, 1:15 p.m., not bad at all. I decided to reload the squirt gun. The rush hadn't started yet. Then I put my "Verbal Abuse Accepted With A Smile" sign on the second level of the counter, just out of sight of the public. I had a reputation for patience to maintain, but the public certainly needed no added incentive to verbally abuse the underpaid.

Bob came in slowly, not hesitating to hesitate upon entrance. He was late. Good, I would leave early. Bob was a nice guy, but he had a tendency to disappear when potential disagreements escalated into real disagreements. Besides, I was paid an exorbitant salary to singlehandedly cure the psychological disorders of customers, most of whom seemed to be entering their mid-life crisis and not quite sure how to deal with it, except to abuse those struggling to maintain a positive philosophical outlook on life in general. I frowned at Bob.

"Yes," he stated, rather than asked.

"What was the question?" I asked with a puzzled expression.

"It's cold outside." Bob was an exciting conversationalist.

"Is it as cold outside now as when it was cold outside before?"

Bob paused, the n asked, "Steve, you ever notice that you're a little weird?"

"Yes, but I keep hoping that, if I eat my vegetables, someday I'll grow up to be a big weird."

Bob shook his head, then asked, "Did I tell you my sister got herself pregnant?"

"I thought only earthworms could do that."

We were interrupted by a small minority person, Asian probably. Bob called them Yabba-Dabba-Doo people because, somehow, no matter what they said, it came out sounding like Flintstone's Yabba-Dabba-Doo. I pointed to the right and nodded. He appeared satisfied.

An expression of ecstasy, something like, "shit, yeah!" exploded from the stock room. Upon investigation, Bob had placed a dart right on old Fred's nose. He had been trying to put one there for six weeks. He was elated.

"I'm taking a break. The place is yours for awhile," I informed him. He appeared disappointed. I didn't blame him. As I walked out, I was already dreading my return.

Contrary to company policy, I got into my car and drove away. I began to ponder the earth-shaking significance

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of my glorious contribution to humanity in general. I thought about my life as I drove. I had the freedom to accelerate, to stop, to turn. Driving was one of the few things I had direct control over. Driving, and the volume of my car stereo. But, it occurred to me as I pulled away from a red Datsun with a sign in the window, "Ex-Girlfriend In Trunk," and part of a blonde wig and half a glove protruding from the closed car trunk, that I had a degree of control over a lot more things than I had given myself credit for.

It was easy to listen to others tell me that it was my life, and to live it, but quite another to actually R-E-A-L-I-Z-E that it was the truth. Naive in my own way, it was a realization that forced me to pull over to an outside pay phone. I called a few old friends and invited them to dinner. Not B. S. friends, but people I could count on to tell me when I was full of shit, my own official family. Then I called Bob and told him I was leaving work early on my day off.

"No way!" was his response.

"Bob, shut up--and do the books tonight," was mine.

Another realization hit me later, when, even on such short notice, almost everyone I cared about showed up, not that there was a huge crowd, but I wasn't keeping score. You don't give a point spread on unofficial family, and you don't get embarrassed with them either, because the only people watching are the poor souls that don't have anything better to do.

I decided that evening that world peace did not come under my direct jurisdiction, and that I couldn't kiss-it-and-make-it-better for the world. I had enough to concentrate on in my own little skullisphere.

The next morning I arrived a little late to open the store. I had stopped at a printing shop. After the usual morning set up routine, I turned up the boom box, hung old Fred by the neck from the rafters, and put a new sign on the counter, in plain sight of the public. It read, "Verbal Abuse Not Accepted Here--At All!"

I was in a good mood, and intended to stay that way. At 10:30 a.m., the husband of the fat lady from the day before called to tell me that he would have my job because of the way I had treated his wife. It was early. All I could come up with was, "You want it that bad, you can have it." Then I hung up on him. For some reason, the gorilla was safe.

****

Doug Paul

THE FOLKIES

Strummin guitars
in Central Park
and wailin on your harp
the gospel truth
from a nasal voice
you're detached, somehow apart

living in the village
warholian decor
rubbing elbows with the underground
Big Brothers on your back
drink coffee with Mr. Hoffman
everyone calls you cat

sister's out in Frisco
stealing all your riffs
the music's not what's changing
just the chemicals we use
she didn't change her name
but they love her just the same

Goodbye Joan and Bobby
your voices are seldom heard now
The times have been a-changin
and dixie's underground
but you gave us an alternative
right when we needed it most

****

Tony Kocielko

I HATED MRS. METZLER

She was a big woman, hard-faced, dowdy, and we hated her as only a bunch of nine-year-old fourth-graders could.

(continued)

She taught with an iron hand. Whether the subject be English, math, spelling, or history, Mrs. Metzler made it seem extremely difficult. She was a stickler for detail and accuracy.

I remember telling my mother that Mrs. Metzler didn't teach us anything. That was how it seemed to me. She gave us reading assignments and, the next day, would simply assume that we knew everything in the reading assignment. Prior to the fourth grade, we did all the reading in class along with the teacher. This approach, of course, put part of the blame for our ignorance on the teacher. Mrs. Metzler put the burden of learning on us. If we didn't know the material, it was our own fault, nobody else's.

Mrs. Metzler never ever lost her temper. She didn't even raise her voice and seemed to be the most patient person alive. This trait, however, does not mean that she couldn't be mean. Her meanness took the form of education by memorizing. I spent nearly every recess of the fourth grade inside, copying my multiplication tables one hundred times each. An icy stare from her could bring perspiration by the pint from around my waist.

The reason I remember her so well, was that the woman was the fairest teacher I ever had. There were no teacher's pets in her class. She showed absolutely no favoritism. If the smartest girl in class forgot her book, she had to write one hundred times, just like the ne'er-do-well in the back if the class. She could not be bribed by apples, Valentine cards, or compliments. She was totally incorruptible.

It seemed to me that Mrs. Metzler was only vaguely aware of us as individuals. She was not particularly interested in any of her students, and made no attempt to get any of us to like her. She was often known to say, "I'm not here to be in a popularity contest." In the playground chatter, she took a lot of abuse. Nobody tried to hide the fact that they hated Mrs. Metzler. I saved some of my best put-downs for her. Being accepted by your peers is very important to a fourth-grader.

Eventually, however, I secretly began to like Mrs. Metzler. She made learning a challenge. There were no tangible rewards in her class for a job well done, although there was a look she gave me when she knew I had made an effort to learn and finally understood. I often found myself striving to get that look. I finally began to realize that the knowledge was the reward. I realized that with that look Mrs. Metzler was saying, "Congratulations, you just solved a difficult problem using only your own resources." She showed me that learning is not easy and that knowledge is its own reward. Solving problems gives us self-respect. The degree of self-respect is directly proportionate to the difficulty of the problem, and strength is gained from perseverance.

It took me many years to realize just how much Mrs. Metzler influenced my life. When I think about her now, I think Mrs. Metzler always knew that someday we would appreciate her. Teachers like her win their students' gratitude by not babying them and by encouraging them to push on with difficult, or even boring tasks. I'm sure Mrs. Metzler had a lot to do with my decision to pursue a career in teaching. Thanks Mrs. Metzler, wherever you are.

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Penny Sartori

PETE ROSE AIN'T GOT NOTHIN' ON ME

We all wonder about people who continually insist on indulging in self-destructive behavior. We shake our heads in disbelief at people who abuse alcohol or drugs. Why would anyone want to smoke? Why do some of us continue to carry around those extra pounds?

"Why are you trying to kill yourself?" my husband and my mother repeatedly asked me. After the "Enema Plunge," I realized they had every reason to consider me suicidal, but I also knew I couldn't quit now. I was going to be a water skier even if it killed me.

"I just have to analyze the turns," I told them both. Once again, I determined the answer to be in the legs. I decided I had to slightly bend my knees to absorb the shock of the boat's wake. Armed with my newest theory, I was off to Coal City. Up on the first try, I felt strong and ready. The spaghetti arms were strengthened from a summer of skiing. They still weren't going to pull me out of the water, but I felt if my legs could do most of the work, my arms could at

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least hang in there until it was over.

As the turn came closer, it occurred to me that I was thirty miles from the nearest hospital. I went out wide, felt the speed pick up, bent my knees and then saw the trees closing in on my right. Oh, this is it, I thought! But the boat began to straighten out, and miraculously enough, so did I.

"I did it! I did it!" I screamed. My husband, Doug, always the enthusiastic, encouraging type, yelled, "Shut up, or you'll fall! It isn't over yet, ya know!"

As we passed the rest of our group on shore, I could hear them clapping and shouting. I felt like I was getting a standing ovation. It went to my head, and I did something else I'd been just dying to do. I let go with one hand and waved! That was it, I knew. The other women were now simply green! You see, they had been having their own problems. Of the five of them, two were at about my level, one was even worse--she was still trying to get up--and one said that after watching the rest of us, she preferred to consider water skiing a spectator sport. I know that still leaves one, but let's not talk about her, shall we? She's one of those 110-pounders that just flies out of the water.

Anyway, by the second turn I found myself wondering what the problem had been. My elation, however, was interrupted by the snake that slithered across the tip of my right ski. I'm sorry I can't be more descriptive about the snake, but he wasn't there long enough for us to become acquainted. Thank God! I screamed and pointed toward it. The guys in the boat laughed. They thought I was still showing off.

Later that day came the big test. Everyone wanted Doug and me to ski double. I kept remembering how disappointed Shelby had been. "Surely, you're not going to refuse to try?" Doug sneered. I shot him the old evil eye, but sweetly said, "And what about the turns?" He grabbed my hand and started running toward the water. "No problem. You just take the outside." Easy for him to say, I thought.

I was so nervous I came up too quick and nearly went right back down. Somehow, I recovered, and we were off. As you may have gathered, I had never (and never will) learned to think of skiing as fun. It was a lot of hard work and pain and a challenge. Doug was having a great time, though, and I let a little of it rub off. I was actually laughing; then came the dreaded turn. I went so wide that Doug's turn was complete long before mine. He had too much slack in the rope, and he started wrapping it around his arm. I had seen him do that many times when the boat would momentarily lose speed. It always made me nervous. I would envision the boat jerking and him going down with the rope wrapped around his arm. I hated to think how badly he could get hurt.

I knew I had to cut my turn short, even if it meant falling. I began putting extra weight onto my left ski and leaned slightly in that direction. It worked. "Nothin' like waitin' till the last second!" he yelled. "Was this my idea?" I screamed back. The rest of the way was smooth sailing. I almost arrived at the shore without getting my hair wet--almost. That was my last goal, and it woul have to wait until next summer.

The night before the first trip to Coal City for the 1981 season, I announced my goal to Doug. "I'm going to ski all the way around tomorrow and come out with dry hair."

"We're going to the lake, Penny. People get their hair wet in the lake. I'm sure I must be missing something here."

"It's not the hair, really," I tried to explain. "I just need to do it! Marie (the boat owner's mother) never gets her hair wet, and she's fifty-five years old! If she can do it, I should be able to. Don't you understand that?" He gave me that blank stare I've seen so many times over the years but never quite have gotten used to.

I went to sleep that night with that familiar feeling of anxiety, dread, and impending doom closing in on me. I'm a firm believer in Murphy's Law, but what else could possibly go wrong?

The next morning was clear and cool. Maybe I won't even ski, I thought. I'll freeze. By noon, though, it was warm enough for even the biggest sissy. The men had each taken several turns while the

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women sat around in jeans and sweatshirts. One by one, we began peeling off the extra clothes, each of us wishing someone else would go first. "C'mon, Sartori, you're a pro now; get out here," some smart-mouth shouted from the boat. "Okay," I mumbled. "Let's get it over with."

Doug reluctantly got up and started toward the boat shaking his head. I heard him say to no one in particular, "When I was a kid I fell down the basement steps once. It not only hurt like hell when I fell, but I was sore for days afterward. I was more careful after that, though. When Penny was a kid she probably fell down the basement steps on a regular basis just so she could find new places to hurt."

"Hey, if I wanted a comedian, I would've brought one along," I snapped. "In the boat, funny man!"

It really was like riding a bike! I was up on the first try, skied a short way, then crossed over the wake and back again--another first. As we approached the turn, visions of the "Enema Plunge" were vivid in my mind. Knees slightly bent, weight slightly shifted to the left, I navigated it perfectly. We passed the shore; I crossed the wake and waved.

"Boo! Hiss! Show-off!" I heard them scream. I loved it. "Eat your heart out," I screamed.

The second turn came and went. I was on the home stretch now, and all I could think of was dry hair. "Let go!" I finally heard Doug yell. I did, but not soon enough. As my face smashed into the sand, I heard some pervert yell, "And the skier is safe at home! Hey, Doug! Did you see your wife's head-first dive into home?"

"Yeah, I saw it. Pete Rose ain't got nothin' on her, except he gets paid to beat himself up."

I lifted my face up and saw my features imprinted in the sand and felt the sand embedded in my face and arms. Doug jumped out of the boat and hurried over to me.

"Now that you've mastered the water, I guess my place is on shore so I can catch you when you land."

"You could ask if I'm all right," I sputtered, spitting out words and sand.

"You must be okay, your hair's dry. Next time around, maybe you could drop a ski."

Suddenly I was thirteen again as I rolled over slowly and flipped him the bird.

****

Joel Stepanek

ROBERT

It was a clear, cool night in mid-summer when twelve boys were coming out of the woods carrying the tools they used to start building the tree fort called Have. It was getting dark, and their parents would start to wonder where they had rushed off to after dinner. We called the fort Haven because everyone agreed that when something was going wrong at home, we could always have a safe place called Haven to run from the worries of today.

And a fort it was. It was built in one of the largest oaks in the woods with many branches at the top but none at the bottom so no invading forces could enter the fort uninvited. We originally had to hook one of the branches with a homemade grappling hook and climb a rope to get to the branches. Henry, the human monkey, and the best climber in the eighth grade and two grades ahead of me, climbed the rope and anchored the top of the rope ladder to a branch. Then we went up the ladder and began to survey our new position. In this part of the woods, there were many other trees at about the same height, but this tree poked above the canopy, enabling us to view the corn fields in the distance. We were not able to see anyone coming because of the leaves. But we weren't worried about the summer. We were excited about winter.

With the leaves gone, we would be able to see anyone coming a great distance away and could ready our ammunitions of snow balls for the great battles that we knew would come this winter. Last year we were horribly beaten by a group of kids from Maple Park who not only took our fort, but used our own snowballs against us.

I walked home that evening with Robert who came over and watched television with me until his mom called and made him go home. The funny thing about Robert is what everyone called him. Robert. He

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was never Rob or Bob or Bobby. He was just Robert. And he wasn't geeky or nerdy or anything like that. He was just quiet and slight. Everyone who knew Robert liked him. Too bad I couldn't say the same thing about me. I got in a lot of fights with older kids in gym class because I didn't have any friends in the class and wouldn't take their crap.

Even though it was summer and I could sleep in, I got up the next morning and ate breakfast with my mom and dad.

"Well, Alex," said my dad. "What are you doing up so early?"

"I've gotta work on the fort, Dad," I answered.

"Honey, I don't like you building that fort in the woods," my mom said. My mom and dad were stereotypical parents. "Still, I don't approve. Dear, tell him about the dangers."

"Come on, June," my dad defended. "I did the same thing when I was a kid." My dad was on my side when it came to doing things like building a tree house or going off with the guys to see a movie, as stereotypical fathers are. He then told us when he was a kid, he and his friends built an underground fort in a field that was so well hidden when people came to look for them, they would walk right over the top of the fort without ever knowing.

"Dad," I questioned. "What ever happened to it?"

My dad laughed. "One day we were hiding from a group of older kids when one fell through the ceiling of the fort. He was so startled with smaller kids yelling and scrambling over him to get out, he forgot about chasing us."

I finished my favorite breakfast of Cheerios and ran out the door toting my Handy Andy toolbox and a sack lunch that my mom made. Even though she didn't approve and didn't understand why I couldn't walk home a half-mile to eat, my mom wanted me to have a good lunch. Robert was waiting on my front doorstep petting our cat that purred to his attention. Our cat liked Robert.

"Hey, Robert, why didn't ya come in?"

"Uh . . . I don't know. I just thought I would sit here and wait." Robert spent a lot of time at my house because his mom worked in the day and his dad worked a night shift and slept in the day, so Robert couldn't have his friends over. Robert's dad didn't really like Robert. He had an older brother which his father had liked the most because he was a star athlete but he died in a bizarre football injury. His neck was snapped by a bad tackle in practice. Robert was far from being a star at anything physical.

Robert didn't have a lunch or a tool box. All he had was a 16-ounce hammer with a fiber glass handle he found when he moved into his house a few years ago. He loved that hammer. The other kids would ask Robert to pound in nails because he had the best hammer in our group.

As we walked to the woods we had to pass through the park which, by an uncharacteristic act of gracious behavior by the village, consisted of a tornado slide, three swings, and a double teeter-totter. All the things a child could ever need to have a full day of fun in the sun. Ha!

In the park were a few kids from Maple Park that came over to see our fort. Or so they said.

"Keep walking, Robert," I said as the seconds it took to pass them turned into years. We were almost in the woods and I thought we might pass them without a confrontation when I heard, "Hey kids, where ya going without your mommy to hold your hand?" The biggest kid was taunting us. His hair was about shoulder-length and unkempt and his clothes looked like they hadn't been washed since Christmas. He had pimples all over his face because he was a little more "mature" than the other boys his age. The other two boys were his henchmen.

"Run into the woods, Robert," I hissed as I turned to face them. I heard a squeal from behind me. There was a fourth member of this goon squad that must have been looking into the edge of the woods, heard us, and was coming back when he came across Robert. He herded Robert into the circle that the other goons created and had us surrounded.

"Go back to your mommies," I told

(continued)

them. They laughed it off.

"Oh, we has got a wise guy," the head goon said. "Well, you should be a little smarter, saying that to somebody which is bigger than you." Did I say their grammar was terrible? They grabbed my tool box; I jumped, but the others held me back.

"Now, what's this?" He held up my small hacksaw. He took the blade out of the saw and bent it back and forth until it snapped. I was really starting to steam. "Oh, look at da cute little hammer." He held up my Handy Andy blue-topped 8-ounce hammer. He threw it into the woods and then stomped on the thin sheet metal Handy Andy tool box. He very graciously handed me the tool box back. I was so mad by now I didn't care if there were four or thirty goons. I broke free of the other kids' hold, and jumped on the head goon. He was very surprised at the sudden attack and fell to my quickly repeated blows. The other boys were shocked and stood watch for a few seconds. I had a clear advantage over the goon and what I lacked in weight and size, I made up with anger. He could do nothing but scream, "Get this kid off me!" and try to protect his body.

The three others shook off the surprise and pulled me off him. I was in a fighting frenzy and struggled to break free of their hold but they held me tight. I calmed down, breathing heavy, and looked at the damage I caused. His nose was bleeding and his eyes were red, and I could tell he would have two good black eyes by tomorrow. He felt his nose and saw the blood. He screamed. Now he was in a frenzy. He scrambled up and started pounding on me. He broke my nose and a few ribs. The boys holding me let me fall on the ground. All four of them started kicking me. All I could do was hold my arms over my head and hope it would end soon.

When I thought I could not take any more, I heard a scream from the head goon. The pounding stopped. I squinted out of my swollen eyes and saw the head goon was on the ground, screaming and holding his head. Robert stood over him, holding his hammer. The other boys were shocked again. They stood looking at Robert with their jaws open. Their minds wouldn't let them believe that meek, little Robert could do this. I could hardly believe it myself. I knew they wouldn't just beat him up if they caught him.

"Run, Robert!" I yelled and he ran. But he was running into the woods and not toward the neighborhood. "No, Robert, not that way!"

"Get him!" yelled the head goon. The other boys chased Robert and the head goon scrambled after him.

"No, Robert," I wheezed as I tried to get up. I couldn't. The pain was too much. I felt a hand hold me down. I looked up, thinking one of the goons came back to beat me somr more. It was Harold, who could be called the leader of our group.

"What happened?" he asked, helping me sit up.

"Four kids from Maple Park beat me up and chased Robert into the woods." Harold yelled to the others from our group and they ran into the woods.

"I've got to help Robert," I said as I tried to get up. Harold held me down.

"We'll get them. You stay here." Harold ran after the others. I continued my attempts to get up, but failed. I was really beat up for a sixth-grader. I heard shouting and then a loud scream. About five minutes passed when two boys from my group, Bob and Jim, hurried over, picked me up, and started to carry me to the street.

"What happened?" I asked and was cut short by the pain in my chest from my broken ribs. They set me down and let me walk with their help.

"They beat Robert pretty badly," said Bob. "When we got to him, he was knocked out on the ground and they were kicking him. But we took care of them. We really pounded them. And Harold really beat that big kid."

The others ran out of the woods carrying Robert. He was still unconscious. They took us to my house, which was the closest and told my mother. She shrieked when she saw me and quickly called an ambulance. It came and took Robert and me away with my mom riding with us, crying.

I was able to go home that night with a broken nose and three broken ribs. Robert had to stay awhile. He had a con-

(continued)

cussion, broken ribs, and a broken arm. My mother told me that when they called Robert's father, he was there in a matter of minutes. He came to see me and I told him how Robert hit the kids that were beating me up and probably saved my life. I was exaggerating, but it was what he wanted to hear.

Robert's father gained a lot of respect for his son that day. He spent more time with Robert every day and when Robert was healed, his father started to teach him how to play football and took him to games. Robert told me later that getting beat up was worth it to have his father back again.

Robert and I spent a lot of time together during high school. We were both on the football team and had classes together. But, we went to different colleges and lost touch over the years. I always wonder what happened to that little boy I once knew a long time ago.

****

Jose Garza

ATU

Embodied time, relentless restless rhyme
Life the canvas with colors bright,
Show me light, Oh star of mine,
The dream, the vision, whose voice
reflects.
An eagle's flight the dawn divide,
Behold its wonder behold its right.
Enflamed and mighty in astro flight,
Across the sea of wonder, the endless
sky,
To fill with wonder the warning night.
An echoed omen! To taro light,
The dancing moon on rustling leaves,
The mighty wind to caress the trees.
The tranquil sound on barren beach,
The rolling waves of crashing seas.
To know the reason for autumn's season,
To tease a tear without painful reason.
To steal the touch of heaven's wonder,
To feel the joy, a melancholy tear
behind heaven's thunder.

****

Ronna Oldham

IF PEOPLE WERE AGELESS

if people were ageless,
the petty barrier of time
would not exist to keep them
from becoming
equally and fully-
human

****

Judy Belfield

OPTIC NERVE

Fingers glued inside
kaleidoscopic gloves
move considerably in opposition
to black and white patterns
of Op-Art vibrations.
Like a Mae West Bedroom,
Dali-eyed paintings on the wall,
her mouth a bed
to sleep satin softly away,
the night crickets anapests
against the rhythm of
a seductive tango--
a liquidly sliding movement
of hips and lips
and the silkiest hair.
All the colors of rainbow Van Gogh
melt into yellow--
the streak of cowards' backs,
and yet a hopeful hue
devoid of cry, except
in anticipation,
like a child hopskipping
handclapping jittery anxious
for the next moment
as though it held
a birthday celebration
in suspended animation.
I laugh, too,
delightedly untouched
by the cynicisms of age:
buttered golden
and punched by sunshine.

****

Judy Belfield

PREMONITION

Fantasy of blue-green
a fluid wave of chiffon
streamed out in the breeze
behind Isadora
motoring through Italian hillsides
smiling
not knowing
the knot at freedom's throat.
We drift like this,
lazing into a moment
like mermaid's hair:
a soft swaying
deep in the sea
as achingly graceful
as a lovesong's final note.
Tomorrow's fingers
belong to a strangler.

****

Nancy Carlin

IMAGES AT MY WINDOW

From this darkening space,
An angling shaft of sun light spears
the dimness.
As the shadowing night envelopes myself,
A color emerges at the window.
A life of memories swarms around this,
BLUENESS.
The blue shimmers with past tears and hopes,
Moments of shared intimacy glow from within
this,
BLUENESS.
Reflections of friendship, sorrow and
pain of
Renewal and communion with the
SPIRIT.
Images of the future--older and frightening.
God, this window is a part of me.
So many times, during this swift moment
of life,
I'll glance up and be engulfed by that
window.
This time between day and
NIGHT.
That diamond of color is a window into
eternity.
The blueness is beyond this world and
Seems to glow a warmth into my soul.
A minute could be a lifetime
Gazing into that
BLUENESS.
BEYOND NOW.
BEFORE YESTERDAY.

****

Madonna Clarke

PARALLEL LINES

It's the lines I have
Spoken, you can't read
Between. It's the words
I have written that
You cannot hear. Lines
Forever running, running
Endlessly. We're parallel
Lines that never meet,
Just parallel lines,
Opposite sides of the street

****

Steve Siedler

ASSUMPTIONS

I entered the room slowly, wishing that my photo-grey lenses would adjust more quickly to the light. The lenses were a great concept, but it took a while for them to change from light to dark, or vice-versa. At times, they left me groping in a state of semi-blindness.

As things focused a little, I looked around the place. I had no idea what the name of it was, but the orange neon Strohs light above the door had attracted my attention. I walked to the bar and found a space, noticing that I had begun to attract a little attention myself. Obviously, my suit and overcoat contrasted sharply with the torn tee-shirts and patched Levis which seemed almost uniform apparel.

A chubby lady with a Brillo-pad hair-cut waddled over to my space.

"Watcha need, hon?"

I stifled an urge to order spumante.

"Strohs, draft please."

As the bartender waddled back to the tap, I took a ten from my wallet and tossed it on the bar. The beer would taste good, or at least it would be cold. I had been imagining the taste for over an hour. Problems and delays at work had gotten everyone there a little over-heated, and I felt I had a right to douse the flames with a cold one or two.

I had been on the road for a couple of hours, and had about three more to go before making it back to Joliet. The company had temporarily shipped me out of state to give a little oomph to a new location. The people had been uncooperative, the new-guy-giving-orders situation.

(continued)

Besides that, the company hadn't matched my expenses, someone had written, "Eat shit!" on my windshield, and I had tripped and fallen down in the parking lot. I was not in a great mood, but it was over. I was going home.

The bartender slowly waddled back with my beer.

"Here y'go, hon."

"Thanks a lot." I pushed the ten towards her. "Could you tell me what city I'm in?"

She snorted, then waddled away, laughing.

"Great," I mumbled. It was an interesting name for a town, but perhaps appropriate, at least from what I had seen so far.

I took a couple of healthy swallows, then slowly took off my overcoat and hung it on the back of a bar stool. The coat was warm, but also very heavy. A friend of mine had joked that it might be bullet-proof. I quickly glanced around the place again and silently wished that it was.

I reached inside my jacket and readjusted the position of the bottle of cough syrup in my left insdie pocket. To add the other inconveniences, I had a cold, and had been carrying the bottle around for several days. My voice was obviously flying south for the winter while I was driving northeast. The ooze-like syrup kept what was left from leaving completely. The problem was that the bottle had a square cap, and chafed my underarm if I left it in one spot too long.

The chubby bartender waddled back and set my change in front of me. I looked at her. She looked at me, then waddled away, laughing again.

I rolled my eyes toward the ceiling, then mumbled, "Great." I knew I wasn't the most attractive guy in the world, but I never really considered myself as funny looking. I decided that the woman was either a little strange, a little drunk, or a little of both. I took another healthy swallow, then turned around to find a pair of glazed eyes staring, not at me, through me, from across the room. The guy was leaning against the wall, swaying slightly, balancing himself by planting the end of a pool cue between his feet and holding the other end tightly with both hands. He looked about my age, except balding badly. The gut was evidence that he had been in a bar before. It was apparent from his wobbling head that the man had little idea what he was looking at. I turned around and looked into my beer, hoping that I hadn't attracted the attention of the human form with the void behind the eyes.

This was a strange place. There were enough people, strange though they might be, but except for the juke box in the corn playing an old song by Chicago, "Searching, there wasn't much in the way of noise. There were no guys shoving each other around no one telling jokes. Weird!

I finished my beer, then nodded to the bartender for another. That started her waddling again.

"Is it always this quiet, here?"

She nodded, then waddled off laughing again.

"Okay," I mumbled. I reached inside my jacket to readjust the damn syrup bottle again. I glanced to my left and noticed a girl looking at me. She must've been in the bathroom, because she hadn't been there when I came in, and I had a habit of checking doors in bars. Besides, she was cute and wearing a short skirt. I would have noticed her.

I smiled, then said, "Hi."

She looked at me another moment, then turned away. I scratched my head, then added, "Or, maybe not."

Slowly I stood up, put the change from the ten in my pocket, then decided to check out the bathroom myself. Beer always had that effect on me, and besides, if I hurried, maybe I would miss much of the excitement. The girl was probably a hooker, anyway.

After the important stuff was taken care of, I combed my hair. I had just gotten a haircut, and it felt a little too short. It was too bad but the girl probably was a hooker. I must not appear to have money, or at least enough.

I heard voices from the bar. Great, somebody was alive out there. I heard a glass break, and someone laughed. Things must just start later in . . . in wherever the hell I was. Someone else laughed.

(continued)

I walked back into the bar, rubbing the highway glare out of my eyes. The bar had become as quiet as before. The only change was that the cute girl in the short skirt was sitting in the bar stool with my overcoat on it. Yep, probably a hooker.

I walked up beside her and grabbed my beer.

"Hi, again." Maybe I did look like I had enough money.

"Hi." Silence.

"That's a start."

"You know, nothing's going to happen here, tonight."

Okay, time for the sales pitch. "Is it always like this, here?"

"Only when you guys are here."

"Huh? I'm here alone."

"You know what I mean." Her skirt had ridden a little higher. I was looking at her legs and she caught me.

"Stop that."

"I'm sorry. What were you saying?" Strange hooker.

"We saw you drive up."

"Great."

"So we know who you are and why you're here."

"I'm Steve, and I'm here to have a beer."

"Bullshit. We know what's going on."

"Good. Maybe you could tell me. I'm not from around here."

"I really don't have to tell you anything."

"Okay, so why are you sitting here?"

"Just to let you know that we're not stupid."

"Good." I was missing something here. "What are you talking about?"

"We saw your car. We know you're a cop."

"A what?"

"A cop."

The girl was cute, but this was beginning to get a little too weird.

"I'm not a cop."

"Look, we saw the antenna and the state police sticker on your car. That wasn't very bright."

"The antenna gives me good FM reception, and the sticker just says that I support local #41."

"Not buyin' it."

"Look! The company I work for made a donation to the state police. They gave us some stickers. I put one on the car because I thought that it might make the difference between a warning and a ticket."

"It's okay. We know all about the undercover drug investigation. That's why nothing's going to happen here."

"That's wonderful, but I'm not a cop."

"You're not, huh?"

"No. Sorry."

"Then why the gun?"

"What gun?"

"This one, here." She poked the bulge in the left side of my jacket, underneath my arm. I couldn't help a silly giggle. This was the weirdest hooker I had ever met.

"Oh, my gun. Well, since everybody knows about it anyway, would you like to see it?"

Her eyes brightened. "Okay."

"I'm not supposed to do this, so you can't tell anybody about it."

"I won't."

I had the feeling she wasn't the only one watching. I slipped my hand inside my coat and reached inside my left inside pocket. Slowly, I pulled out the often deadly bottle of decongestant cough formula.

She batted her eyes, then gently patted the side of my coat.

"You son of a bitch!"

"Maybe, but I'm not a cop."

Someone behind me laughed. I sat there with a silly grin. The girl began to laugh too.

"Can I buy you a drink now?"

"I guess so."

I shook my head, still grinning. "Un-fuckin'-believable." I tried to picture Officer Steve, and failed miserably. "Can we start this again? I'm Steve, a sales consultant." I offered my hand. She took it.

"I'm Cheryll."

"Nice to meet you."

"NIce to meet you."

I motioned to the chubby bartender with the Birllo-pad haircut. She waddled over again.

"Could we get a couple of drinks?"

"Sure, Hon. These are on the house." She waddled away.

"Thanks. So, Cheryll, what do you do for a living?" Whoops, silly question.

(continued)

Assumptions, continued

"I'm a computer program consultant."

"Great. This is almost like a paradox."

"A what?"

"A paradox. That's what you get when you nail boards together around two boats parked side by side."

"Okay."

I felt a tap on my shoulder, and turned in time to see my human form with the void behind his eyes. He smiled, then said, "How's it goin'?"

"Not bad. How're you doin'?"

Somebody kicked the jukebox.

"It's Hip To Be Square," by Huey Lewis and the News cranked up. Cheryll touched my arm. I turned to face her.

"Steve, when you asked me what I did for a living, what did you think I was going to say?"

"Well, from looking at you, I'd say probably a computer program consultant."

"Really?"

"Oh yeah, you definitely look like a computer program consultant."

"Good."

"Yeah."

****

Ronna Oldham

HOPE

Cotton candy misery
Bound tight on a spool,
In a thriving fist.
Dull the death knives,
Break a pane
Sending a tingling trail
Up through
A sleepy spine.
Life, you are all mine.
Stagger and sway, ascendant,
Inebriated soul!

****

Steve Fisk

SOMEDAY

There we were . . .
Two people sharing the same beliefs,
living the same lives,
dreaming the same dreams..

...uncommon, I guess
two spirits becoming one?

Here we are...
worlds apart...
our beliefs as far apart
as the West from the
East
our lives, unrecognizable
to each other
our dreams...words are
not appropriate...

have you drifted too far away from shore?
or am I afraid of the water you are in?

Where will we be...

there is another world waiting,
for you...for me...us?
to be filled with memories of tomorrow
different memories to be sure
better or worse?
we cannot see from where we stand today...
do you want to begin a new journey with me?

.....someday

****

Steve Siedler

IF THERE'S NO FIRE, WHAT'S THE RUSH

I was semi-conscious as I started the car, turning on the stereo, loudly, to clear the webs. I had just worked twelve hours, four longer than indicated by the schedule, and I was trying to prepare myself, both physically and mentally, for a three-hour night-time south-bound cruise. I was not sure how well I would weather the drive, but I had promised to show up, and I would. A promise was a promise, but more than that, besides being wary of highway dangers, I was looking forward to the weekend, or what was left of it.

(continued)

If There's No Fire, continued

I had met Linda a few months earlier. She was a good friend of a female cousin, and when they came to town, I had called a friend to make it a foursome. I had been seeing her regularly for a couple of months, the visits being limited to weekends because of work schedules and the three-hour one-way drive. We had become friends, close to being good friends, and I saw no reason the relationship could not continue and develop into something more.

I had become a welcome guest in her parents' home. They had even grown accustomed to my different sense of humor, and had made me feel very comfortable. Spending a little time in a small town had given me a chance to unwind, and I sincerely enjoyed spending time with Linda. She was nice, really nice, and cute too. I had the feeling that she was someone that could be trusted, and I think the feeling was mutual.

I had packed before work, and knew the route well. My biggest concern, even after popping a couple of No-Doz, was staying on the road for three hours. I figured I'd either make it or I wouldn't, logical, but overly simplistic at best.

Well, I must have made it, because I've written this since. I cruised into the driveway at about one a.m., figuring that no one would be awake, and that, not wanting to awaken the household, I'd be stuck spending the night in the car. I had called, and was expected to arrive late, but not that late. Mental images of leg-cramps and no sleep clouded my vision until I was parked and looking at a well-lit house. Great--no leg cramps.

Linda met me at the door. Taking a good look, she said, "Holy ..." but paused there. She shook her head, smiled, then said, "Come inside. You look terrible."

"Thanks for the vote of confidence." I smiled, I think.

Linda laughed, grabbed my bag, then took my arm and led me inside, leaving me against a wall as she took my bag into the guest room. She returned and, with little help from me, pried me from the wall and led me to the couch, turned me around, then pushed downward on my shoulders. I managed a sitting position, sort of. Linda knelt, and proceeded to take off my shoes. I had had those things on for at least sixteen hours, but she didn't even back away from what I'm sure was a less than pleasant aroma. She propped my feet on the coffee table and sat down next to me.

"You could've come tomorrow," she said.

"I know, but I said I'd be here tonight, and besides, if it's all right with you, I wanted to see you."

"Oh, it's all right with me, but Steve," she paused, "can you see me?"

"Not very well, sorry."

"That's okay," she smiled again. "Do you want a beer?"

"Yeah, but I shouldn't. One will put me out for sure."

"You could use the sleep." She strolled into the kitchen, quickly returning with an open Miller and a chilled glass.

As she poured the beer, I watched and, when she had finished, asked,

(continued)

Judy Belfield

FIRELIGHT EYES

speak softly
carry sticks
jump over candles
know Coleridge winters
feel passion violetly
deep enough to drown,
dance Stravinsky
play cellos and Pan pipes
all the day
all the night.
Firelight eyes
sing gypsy blues
at full-moon time
wash out with the tide
from here to eternity
finger forbidden folds
sparkle like Tinkerbell's feet
after eating canaries
while the cat's away
all the night
all the day.

****

"Have I ever told you that I'm starting to like you?"

"Yes, but it's nice to hear, anyway."

Two swallows later and I was drifting off somewhere. I wasn't sure where, but when I drifted back, it was light outside. Inside too, for that matter, because I was inside and could see without electric visual aids. I just assumed that it must have been light outside also, although I didn't check.

I walked, or rather stumbled, into the kitchen, and met a guy who looked almost as bad as I did. He needed a shave, had bloodshot eyes, was dressed in a bathrobe, and drinking a Miller.

"Hello?" I questioned.

"Hi, I'm Carl. You wanna beer?"

"Why not," I answered, wondering who the hell the guy was. He was friendly enough, but to find a strange guy in the kitchen drinking a beer in the early hours of the morning was a bit unnerving.

"I'm Linda's brother-in-law. You must be Steve."

"Yeah, I don't feel much like him this morning, but I must be."

"I know what you mean. We flew in from California yesterday, and I feel like shit, when it's cold."

The town was having its annual festival, just like every other town in Illinois has a "Something-Fest" on one weekend or another. For Linda's family, it was a reunion of sorts, family, plus enyone else that decided to show up. Good thing, because I wasn't family.

"Linda said you're a nice guy," Carl stated, tipping the Miller. "Is she right?"

I raised the Miller in answer. "Not until I get a swallow of this."

Carl grinned, and said, "I hear ya, man."

"Anybody else awake?" I yawned.

Carl yawned, shrugged, then farted. I decided Carl was all right, I'm not sure why, he just was.

Linda walked into the kitchen, looking first at me, then at Carl, then at the open beer. "How can you guys drink that stuff in the morning?"

"With our mouths," Carl answered. Yep, Carl was all right.

Linda walked over and sat on my lap. God, it was early to have someone sit on anybody's lap. She softly nibbled on my ear, then stated, "I take it you're feeling better."

"A bit. You wanna beer?"

"That depends, do you want to clean up the mess?" It took a while for the question to sink in, but once it did, a "No" escaped quickly. I didn't want to think about what would happen if I had answered "yes."

Things began to happen quickly. I met Barb, Linda's sister, with the introduction by Carl of "This is my wife. She threw up last night and clogged up the sink." Good stuff before breakfast, Carl.

I shaved, carefully, and I emphasize the word carefully, then showered. Damn it, it was cold. I dried myself quickly, then dressed even more quickly. Breakfast, which hung like a low fog on a long, low stretch of flat stomach followed. Something about heavy-duty breakfast food that has always made my throat shrink, so as to prevent violation by pancakes and such.

Church! Aha, church! Yeah, it scared me too, but I went, and I watched the devout Christians nod off at irregular intervals. I had been described as non-denominational, almost as bad as a man with tits, but I listened, and might have sang a song or two, but I didn't know the words, and I figured ad-lib was definitely out of the question, although some of the melodies were catchy.

A quick change, and it was time for volleyball. No screw around games here, serious stuff, this central Illinois volleyball. Carl was good, but I guess people living in California should be good volleyball players, otherwise, why live in California. It was very unintentional that I spiked the ball into Carl's forehead, three times. Carl only counted the fourth, which I did on purpose.

"You owe me a beer for that one!"

"You got it."

That cheered him. Like I said, Carl was all right.

Okay, Food Time. What can I say? I am a bigger person, and bigger people desire bigger portions--of everything. I pigged out, and it felt great. Steak on

(continued)

the grill, I would eat it anytime, and feel great about it. So I did. Then--

It was time to head downtown, and I say that because most of the town was down an enormous hill, which made the town area downtown. Sounds logical, right? That's what I thought, besides, that's where the bars were, and Carl wanted to hit the bars. I was in no mood to argue. Carl had one coming on me.

Carl had two on me, then I had two on Carl, then he had two on me, then I had two more on him. It was a good thing Linda had a lot to talk about with her sister, because, otherwise, they would have seen a guy from California and a guy from Joliet dancing on their knees. I thought we were fairly good at it. I don't think Linda or Barb appreciated the art form, but we did.

Somewhere between lower leg joint grinding, in a quiet moment, Linda confided, "You are so weird, but you're so good at it." We danced to a slow song, closely, and I enjoyed it a lot. Carl was off somewhere on his knees again, so we decided to take a walk.

We walked, held hands, and after repeated glances over my shoulder down the dark streets, Linda finally giggled and requested, "Would you please relax? We're not in Joliet, you know."

We walked a little farther when, suddenly, she stopped, spinning me into a hug. Linda looked into my eyes, corny line right? Linda looked at my eyes, and said, "Steve, I have something to tell you." She had mentioned an old boyfriend before and here it goes, I thought, the "I still want to be friends," speech. The muscles in my arms tensed and I prepared, then said, "Go ahead."

She looked at me steadily, then said, "I love you."

"What?" It was the best I could do.

"I said, 'I love you.'"

I was quiet for a while. Perhaps a little too quiet. Linda asked, "So, how do you feel?"

"Honestly, I thought you were about to dump me."

She laughed. "No, don't laugh, I really thought you were going to dump me," I stated.

We sat down on a street curb. I had thought of the possibility of this conversation sometime in the future, but, for now, I was speechless. For some unexplainable reason, I couldn't return the emotional expression, even though Linda was probably the nicest woman I have or had ever met.

Instead, I found myself giving the same speech that I had expected a few minutes earlier, the "It's too soon for me--I care a lot about you--I want to see you again--I'm just not ready to say love yet" B. S. speech. The one that sounds lame no matter how articulate the presentation. I meant every word, but it even sounded like B. S. to me. We walked silently back to the house, then quietly said, "Good night."

The next morning, as I threw my stuff into the car, Linda came down to say goodbye and call me, and let's get together again. We kissed, then promised to call each other.

I was ready to leave when Carl came down to the car. He didn't look happy, but I had to go with what I thought was right. He held out his hand, and after considering the wisdom of doing so, I clasped it firmly and shook it.

Carl looked at me, shook his head, then said, "Linda told me about last night." He paused, then added, "You know what probably would have happened if you would have lied to her?"

"Yeah, I know, but I also know how I would have felt this morning about it."

"You know, Linda trusts people easily, sometimes too much, but in your case, she was right."

"About what?"

"You are a nice guy."

"Yeah!" I said, looking at my dashboard. I shook his hand again, and left to his parting, "Take care."

Maybe I was a nice buy, but, somehow, on the long drive home, I just couldn't shake the feeling that I had just lost something important, someone important, and despite the parting promises and good intentions, as it turned out, I had.

I guess that's a chance you take when you play by your own rules.

****

Steve Siedler

MISSING ME

Noise, I hear noise. Mumbles and a crash. Eventual realization, the clock-radio is on. It screams, "I'm back in the saddle again!" Oh God, Aerosmith at 8:00 a.m. Maybe it will go away. "I'm back in the saddle again!" It isn't going away.

The fog of sleep lifts slowly, leaving its sediment in my mouth. I suck in vain to produce moisture, then give up and turn on the bedroom light. I yawn, then stumble to the bathroom with a finger in my left eye, no moisture there either.

I flip on the bathroom light and glance in the mirror. "Oh, man," I say aloud. I point at the strange face in the mirror and, shaking my finger, say, "Man, you look awful." I shake my head in disgust, then turn, scratch my head, and bend to turn on the water for a shower. My foot slips, and the front of my knee makes sharp contact with the edge of the tub.

"Shit! Shit! Shit!" I growl through clenched teeth. Morning vulgarity has always seemed the most profound to me.

The water on, I prepare myself mentally for the physical anguish that usually accompanies the manly art of shave thy face. Wet thy face, squirt goop in hand, rub over thy face, and scrape thy face with an extremely sharp metal alloy blade. Scrape, scrape, scrape, blood. Scrape, scrape, scrape, blood. The manly ritual almost always results in drawing blood, but twice isn't bad, especially when in a hurry.

A quick wipe with a towel and it's dental hygiene time. I'm not sure why it is impossible to brush teeth without looking into a mirror to see a silly looking face with froth dribbling from the mouth. For me, it is.

No thought involved, it is shower time. After five years, I know exactly where to set the knobs and exactly how long to wait before stepping in. The temperature is perfect. My eyes begin to open, although they would have been extremely useful while shaving. Thoughts begin to form. Damn soap is too small. I am overwhelmed by an urge to sing a song. Too bad I don't know any. "La-de-da, Sail on, sail on, la-de-da, wish I knew the words.

Time check? I am going to be late again.

Out of the shower. Damn it's cold out here. Towel wrapped around body. Still cold, body awake. Mind semi-conscious.

Dry that body,
Dry it now.
Gotta make money
  anyplace anyhow.
Comb that hair
  and let it dry.
Gotta sell somethin',
I'm not sure why!

Seventy hours a week for five years is getting to me. "Don't think, you late. You go work now." Inner voice lacks intelligence, but is correct. Time to dress.

1. Underwear ✓
2. Socks ✓
3. Pants ✓
4. Shirt ✓
5. Shoes ✓
6. Tie ✓
7. Wallet, Comb ✓✓
   Keys Change ✓✓
8. Bubblegum ✓

Time check? "Shit, I'm late."

Keys out of pocket and out the back door. Double check on back door--locked. Lights still on? Tough.

I step in a puddle, bad for the shoes. Key is in the car door lock. The door is open. I step in and sit down. Door closes. Engine starts third try, like every day. Car backs out. Time for kiddie check. No targets present. Proceed with all available haste. I turn the radio on. A voice tells me that it is a beautiful day outside. Doesn't matter, I won't see it.

Things begin to pass by, flying things, driving things, growing things. Just a bunch of damn things in my way to assure that I won't make it to work on time today either.

"Old man, move your car faster. You're delaying my contribution to the

(continued)

United States G. N. P. I could drive this route in my sleep." Intense realization, I probably have.

I plug a tape into my cassette player, doesn't matter what it is. Okay, avoid the idiot slowing down. Nice Chevelle ahead, used to have one, years ago. Getting close to Crank-Em-Out headquarters. It's bubble gum time. Boston tape from 1978. It has been playing for ten minutes and I've just noticed. Scary.

Bubblegum tastes flat today, but it keep the mouth moving. Salesmen need a constantly moving mouth, it's an unwritten rule. I wonder how much garbage I can sell today to people that don't really need it. We get bonus points for selling a product that is more expensive than the customer actually needs. I've been getting a lot of bonus points lately. That scares me.

I pull into the parking lot of Crank-Em-Out headquarters and park. Time check? Watch reads 9:22. I've still got eight minutes until 9:00. I set my watch a half-hour ahead as a morning motivational aid. My God! I've got eight minutes of freedom. What to do?

I think about the offer for promotion. Ah, for an extra five hours a week I can get a raise and rise a step on the corporate ladder. I wonder how many more people I'll have to screw. Probably just people in my present position and below. I stare through the dashboard for a long moment, listening to Boston's "A Man I'll Never Be."

Time check? 9:25. Maybe if I work here another ten years, they'll let me work a hundred hours a week. Then I'll probably have to screw everybody. That's a far cry from 1978 when I was fired for answering a question. The man asked, "What's the difference between this camera and that one for a hundred dollars less?"

"Besides the price? Not much," I answered. It was the truth.

Anyway, I survived. What time is it? 9:27. What day is it? Doesn't matter. What God damn month is it? Uh. Yeah, I survived. My hair is thinning, but big deal, I've got money in the bank and the vice-president of the company likes me. He calls me Hot-Shot, and slaps me on the back every time I come through for him. Sales are far ahead of schedule, so I deserve to work seventy-five hours a week. He likes me. He likes me because . . . because he can screw me. He must get bonus points too.

Well, it's 9:29 by my watch. Definitely a far cry from 1978. I look in the mirror, turn up the volume, wink and smile. Not a salesman smile, a me smile. I'm sure it is a spontaneous decision. No, on second thought, it isn't that spontaneous, at all.

Casually, I turn the key in the ignition. The car starts third try, like always. I pull out of the parking lot and stop at the stop sign. I raise my imaginary toast to Crank-Em-Out headquarters, then turn onto the highway. The me-smile is still there. The voice from the radio was right. It is a beautiful day-- NOW!

****

Madonna Clarke

JE ME CHERCHE PAR TU

Je me cherche par tu
In places throughout the
world where I can only
be in spirit. Je me
cherche par tu in
everyone I meet
searching their eyes
to find you in their
soul. Je me cherche
par tu in myself
to only find I cannot
see you. Je me cherche
par tu will I ever
find you waiting for me?

****

Sharon Peck

INTIMATE STRANGERS

It didn't surprise her.
Not really.
What did surprise her was the fact that it had been going on for so long,

(continued)

unnoticed. She had always prided herself on being discerning, observing, aware. Shaking her head, she wondered aloud, "How could I have missed the signals?"

She glanced quickly at the rear view mirror as she changed lanes and saw a pair of tired eyes staring back at her. She had slept little last night and was anticipating a busy day. "Damn him!" she swore at her reflection. "Damn him and his lousy sense of timing."

She braked for the stop light and stared absently out the car window. She noticed a young couple, obviously in love, walking, floating, down the sidewalk. He walked backwards as if he couldn't bear to miss, even for a second, the chance to watch her, all of her. His hands tugged gently at the tassled ends of the red muffler draped loosely around her neck. They laughed together, oblivious to the world around them. "Was it ever really that simple?" she asked herself. "And why does this have to happen now?"

She tried to remember a time when they had been truly happy. Satisfied. Content just to be together. Just to be a couple. It seemed so long ago.

She thought about the night they had graduated from high school. She closed her eyes and saw the royal blue caps being tossed high into the air. She heard their shouts of joy. She felt again that thrill of anticipation, that wonder at the unknown, that naive confidence in a bright future. She grinned as she recalled the party afterwards and the pink toilet paper streamers dangling from the tall oak trees in Old Lady Rainey's front yard. After all these years, the memory of their coup still amused her. They had spent hours planning their strategy and their plans had paid off. They had earned the recognition and respect of the entire graduating class when word spread that the two of them, together, had successfully tee-peed the principal's yard. Yes, she remembered, they had made a good team ...then.

The sudden sound of a car horn rudely interrupted her reverie. She looked up at the light, now green, and pulled out into the steady stream of traffic.

As she raced to the office, thoughts raced through her mind: thoughts of college, of dorm parties, of panty raids, or rap sessions that had kept them awake until four in the four in the morning; still more thoughts of eager hands, groping, searching for something else, something more, in the back seat of his Cutlass Supreme. Her mind jumped to English 103 and she remembered with a special sense of pride their joint presentation comparing the literary trends of the American and English Renaissance. They had both received an "A," she thought, somewhat proudly. What was it Professor Tierney had said? Oh yes..."you two compliment each other well."

As she passed Marie's Bridal Shoppe, she saw a mannequin dressed in virginal white, smiling at passers-by, promising marital bliss to any young bride wise enough or rich enough to choose one of Marie's latest original designs. She stifled a giggle as she recalled her mother's well-meaning advice to her new son-in-law that night at their elaborate wedding reception. "Be gentle," she had counseled, "she's so young, and she doesn't know much about ... you know." The two of them had later roared with laughter at her mother's unnecessary concern. "We were good together," she muttered, "even in bed. Especially in bed."

She applied the brakes as a school crossing guard stepped boldly into the rush-hour traffic. He resembled a well-dressed scarecrow as he took a protective stance in the middle of the busy intersection. The car idled as children of various shapes and sizes safely crossed the street. "Were our own two ever that small?" she wondered. She pictured the night the twins had been born and her eyes filled with tears, as they had that night when the docotr handed to her a perfect little girl, and to the proud new father, a tiny new son. "You two should do this again sometime," he had teased. "You do good work."

"And we did," she mused. "We really did."

She startled suddenly as the guard's loud whistle broke into her reflective

(continued)

mood. She looked at her watch and realized that she'd better hurry if she intended to be on time for her first appointment.

As she neared the office, she reminded herself that in some ways the years had been very good to them. They had pursued successful, if separate, careers, and both were well-respected in their chosen professions. It was true that they had grown in different directions, but having made their choices, they'd accepted the consequences and had gradually become indifferent to the cost.

"The children both turned out well," she consoled herself and thought longingly of her daughter, who was enjoying her work as a congressional aide and her son, who had become a pilot for a commercial airline.

In her mind, she could see their expensively-furnished home and professionally landscaped lawn and knew that she and her husband were envied by many of their unknowing neighbors. "If they only knew," she said as she pulled into her reserved parking spot.

Moments later, she caught sight of herself reflected in the elevator mirorr. "Damn him," she cursed again as she examined the dark shadows underneath her eyes. "Why did he choose last night to confess this affair of his? I just can't deal with this right now. I have enough problems to handle today."

She set her chin and squared her shoulders as she stepped from the elevator and walked down the carpeted hall to her office.

She heard greetings of "Morning, Doctor," and smiled brightly as she pushed open the door marked Associated Marriage and Family Counselors. Tossing her hair, she responded light, "Good morning, all. The doctor is in."

****

Dutes Miller

HEAR THE MUSIC

hear the music
feel it touch your soul
the history of man flies
through the air on waves of sound
a message from soul to soul
hear the players
feel them make you dance

hear the drums
feel their pain
made of the skins of human slaves
they beat out the rhythm
of the work, the blood, the sweat,
and tears
the heart beats of the drums
enslaves the dancers and
drives them into frenzy

hear the violins
feel their tears
their strings mourn for the unjustly killed
battered down in fear
battered down in confusion
hear the painful tears come down from all
time
feel the pain as it mades the dancers
convulse

hear the music
feel it touch your soul.

****

Jean Tyrell

THE DESIRE TO RACE

Margie wanted to race Labor Day in Moline, but what would dad say?

She was already faced with the fact that Roger, her brother, complained all the time she trained with him. It was hard enough to get time to train, and dad wouldn't let her ride with anyone else. Last time whe went out with Roger and his bike racer friends, she couldn't keep the pace, and got dropped, separated from the others. She'd biked the fifteen miles home by herself. When dad found out that Roger let her ride home alone, he'd gotten mad at Roger, and Roger was even less willing to have her along.

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Fourteen-year-old Margie never understood why dad didn't let her do things that sixteen-year-old Roger could. Dad was unwavering in his position. "Girls do not race on bikes."

Margie tried arguing her point, but she never won. Dad's old-fashioned views seemed unchangable.

"Whadya expect?" Roger'd shouted at her after dad chewed him out. "I told you those racer guys didn't stop when people didn't keep up," and he'd gone off in a huff. His younger sister was a big crybaby anyway. The only reason she came was because his riding buddy, Mike Trancher, invited her. Trancher didn't have any sisters and he didn't know what he was asking for. Roger had tried to warn him. He'd tried to warn Margie too, but no, she had come.

Unknown to her dad, Margie had raced in a time trial this summer. A time trial is a race against the clock. The event was part of a day of races held in Chrystal Lake, Illinois. Most of the races were for licensed riders, like Roger and Trancher--that's who she went with. But the time trial was for unlicensed riders. Margie figured because it was a time trial, she wasn't actually racing with others, but she still hadn't told dad. She kept telling herself she was waiting for the right moment.

Both Margie and Roger had been riding since they were youngsters. Dad ran the Schmitty's Bike Shop in Muscatine, Iowa. His kids were raised around bikes and biking was as natural to them as walking. Because they'd spent summers in the shop, both of his children knew a great deal about bike repair. Margie knew other kids her age were into rock groups and albums, but not her. She was too busy fixing bikes, studying bike catalogs and reading about her favorite bike racers.

Summers, especially May and June, Roger and Margie went downtown in the mornings to work at the shop. Newcomers, who traded at the bike shop in Muscatine, were always surprised to see a young slender girl with long, long hair working in the store. Margie would come to the front counter to wait on customers with a cheery toss of her long braids and a grin that lit up her hazel eyes. She wore shorts, but a tool apron covered them and she was oblivious to the stares that her trim legs attracted.

This summer had been a slow one at the shop. Another bike shop opened in the new mall. Maybe because it was a good location, or who knows what, it had taken some of Schmitty's business.

The town was hardly big enough to support one bike shop, let alone two. Dad just shook his head whenever talk of the new shop came up. He never related his disapproval, but his close-lipped silence on the matter spoke loud enough.

Margie could never remember her dad being in this kind of mood. As always, he was extremely formal and polite, and precise. But this summer, he seemed to be working under pressure. He was frequently short-tempered with Margie and Roger.

His children's escape came in late afternoon, when work was over. They'd go riding.

Today, the freewheels on the bicycles hummed as the tires contacted the pavement. Margie could only concentrate on the back of her brother's bike and the narrow distance needed to catch his draft. Drafting, a racing technique, required concentration. She noted Roger's every movement to keep from running into him. By keeping this close she benefitted from the wind break created by the front rider's momentum knifing through the air. She could keep up with him, while he worked all the harder out in front against the wind.

The four-mile trip home was transportation as much as it was training. Margie slowed and caught her breath the last few blocks before home. Trancher was in the yard in his biking jersey and cleats waiting for Roger.

"Hello Shortstuff," he said when he saw Margie, and he grinned. His freckles seemed to have multiplied across his face this summer. "You riding with us today?"

Margie was secretly pleased.

"It depends on Roger. I don't know what kind of mood he's in."

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Roger just shrugged when asked, so feeling like she'd been given a reprieve, Margie, excitedly trailed behind the boys as they rode to the outskirts of town.

One of their favorite routes was eleven mile on county roads. It was here they took turns leading a draft line to break the warm, southwest wind.

"Geez, it's hot," thought Margie, as they pulled in a gas station parking lot where they refilled on water from an outside faucet.

Margie could feel the sweat drip out from under her helmet.

"How ya doing?" Trancher looked at her.

Margie noticed even the end of his upturned freckled nose had a sweat drop hanging on to it. Margie nodded.

"Okay." But her okay was raspy. She needed more time to catch her breath.

"Let's go easy on into Wilton. We'll turn around there and go back," said Roger.

Margie blinked her eyes incredulously. Her knees still felt like jelly now that she was off the bike. "Hey," said Margie, "I thought you guys were going to do a moderate workout. What is a moderate workout?" She let her breath out in a long pant.

Trancher smiled with a look of feigned surprise and said, "Margie, we were going slow so you cold keep up," and he let out a big guffaw.

At first Margie was taken. Then she realized he was kidding. In spite of catching her breath, she grabbed her water bottle and shot a stream of water at him.

"That's how slow I am, Trancher."

He ducked and rolled away. In turn, he snatched the water bottle off his bicycle and set his bicycle down. He twisted sideways avoiding the second stream from her water bottle. Margie moved and yelped as his jet of water hit her. Just as a second thought, Margie shot water at Roger who had been laughing. He, too, grabbed his water bottle and the fight was on.

In the midst of corn fields near at the intersection of Sontag and Fahrner Roads, a water fight took place. The three participants, all in bright shirts and dark shorts, fought with water weapons until laughter stopped them. The participant who got the wettest was the shortest and the only girl. The three mounted bikes and headed north on Sontag Road. The few wet spots on the pavement dried almost before the riders were out of sight.

"You going down to the shop, Roger?" Roger was sitting in the breakfast nook with a bowl of Cheerios and was reading the latest edition of "Bike Racing News." Mom said when they came in dad called. He was getting backlogged on some new bike orders.

"Rog," Margie's voice tone grew when she realized he had not heard what she said, "Are you gonna go down and help Dad?"

He answered without even looking up. "Why don't you go."

With a look of exasperation, Margie finished combing her nearly dry hair and braided it down her back.

"Ma," she shouted to her mother, who was in the back of the house. "I'm going down to help dad." Margie never heard her mom's faint "Okay" because she was already out the side door.

Margie held a brownie from the bakery in one hand and wheeled her bike in through the back screened door of the bike shop with the other. The wood door had many greasy finger marks along its exterior. Over the years, tons of kids and their bikes, and parents and their kid's bikes had come in through the back door of the shop. Margie parked her bike in an out of the way place and shouted to dad that she had arrived.

Dad was out in front with a customer. "Hellow Margie," he answered with a big shout.

"Sounds like the mood is good," though Margie.

She went and got her tool apron off the hook. She craned her neck from the bike stand and wondered who her dad was talking to. She could only see the gentleman's green shirt, and muscular arms. He was a distinctive redhead too.

When he turned to face dad as dad got behind the counter, she could see his tan. Dad was discussing the Labor Day Bike Race. But who was that? He looked older than Roger and he was not one of the fellows Roger raced with.

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He had a square angular face. He looked towards her standing in the rear work area, and she caught with the vague feeling that he was nice looking. He smiled, it was more a grin, back at her, and she realized she'd been staring. She looked away and proceeded to wonder if he was watching her change a tire.

She was still putting the tire on when dad came into the workroom.

"Oh, your customer's gone," said Margie, with feigned interest.

"He left ten minutes ago," said Dad. "He was interested in a cyclo computer. He's apparently from Connecticut. He raced in college. Sounds like he wants to enter the Labor Day Race.

For the first time in quite a while, Margie could see Dad in more relaxed mood. He smiled and hummed a bit under his breath. Margie was always amazed at Dad's great enthusiasm for racing.

"What else did he say?" Margie was interested in finding out who the nice-looking racer was.

"He's visiting the bank on a sort of business internship, from some school in Illinois. I can't remember where." The details of this person's life weren't half as important to Dad as the idea that the customer was a bicycle racer.

"Dad," she hesitated for a moment. "I know you're taking Roger down to Moline for the bikeride on Labor Day. Are you taking anyone else?" This really wasn't what she wanted to know. But it was a place somewhere to start.

Dad was already at the other bikestand concentrating on the wheel he was working on. Margie wasn't sure if he was listening any longer.

The boys were Roger's racing buddies. Other years, "the boys" had been the group of young riders that hung around the bikeshop. The faces changed through the years as the boys grew up. Some of the young fathers in town were already bringing their little boys to the shop to buy them BMX bikes, so that some day the youngsters would be Schmitty's boys too.

Roger grew up into membership in "the boys." It was natural--he knew about bikes and rode as well or better than anyone.

But Margie was a girl. That made a difference. She was becoming a fine mechanic and good rider but Dad didn't like her riding with the boys. Time after time he assigned Roger to "keep an eye on your sister." Roger hated it. If only she could prove herself. That's why Trancher was a nice change. He really acted like he thought she rode well.

"Dad," Margie started off again, "You don't care if I go with you to Moline, do you?"

"If there's room, you could go." Kurt Schmitz glanced at his daughter and realized there was more to the question.

From the repair stand he looked over his glasses at her. "Margie, I won't sign the form for you to ride. You need parent permission."

"But Dad, I'm as good or better than most of the girls in those races. I know it."

"Settle down, Margie. How do you know it? You never rode."

Margie bit her lip. She could feel the tears under her eyelids. "Dad, I know because I was in a time trial at Chrystal Lake. I took third in my age group."

Dad bristled at the news. "Margie, I told you racing was out. How could you race knowing how I felt?"

"It was a time trial, Dad. I was racing the clock, not anyone else."

Now defiance was creeping into her voice. "Besides Dad, Roger always gets chances. But no, I'm a girl, so I just get stuck fixing these stupid bikes."

She looked with disgust at the tire in her hands.

Silence came between them. Dad looked at his daughter as if analyzing a bicycle before declaring it fit to ride. She was small, but sturdy. He let out his breath with a sigh.

"So you've time trialed, but only once. Even with the girls, especially with the girls, someone's always getting hurt."

Margie looked up. This was the furthest the discussion ever got. That was hopeful.

"Dad, please, you know I'm a careful rider. How can I get better if I never do it? Please, Dad, just this once."

(continued)

And Dad could feel his resolve fade. "I told you not to race. I'm really mad that you did. I'm going to ground you for that. I think I know how bad you want to, but that's no excuse for doing something I told you not to do." He searched for the last word. "Margie, I will be in charge of your training."

"You mean you will help me train...for a race!"

A young girl's joyous shrieks came from Schmitty's Bicycle Shop. Inside a bounding daughter jumped and hugged her dad all at the same time. Her head hit his jaw.

"We will see," he said, smiling and rubbing his jaw. "We'll see about the race. One step at a time here."

****

Ronna Oldham

ACCEPTANCE

I will take you as you are,
Whether you hover close,
Or run beyond range.
There exist sinners and so-called
Redeemers but No One, may demand
An alteration
Solely to satisfy complacent interests.

I see you sitting, peering skyward,
Drenched in a self-made tear-pool
Of greed and egotism.
We both weep and cry out,
As starved as the day longing for
the sun,
And the night for the moon.
But I will accept you always,
Without a change.
I must dry my brow so to be
Barely worthy enough to look you in
the eye.

****

Ronna Oldham

DON'T TRUST ME

Don't trust me, tiny bird.
You perch meekly on my finger
Expecting gentleness.
You think I'll take good care of you.
What if I, with one swift thrust,
Slam your fragile body flat against
the wall in my anger?
Or worse yet, tear your precious wings off
In my frustration with life,
While you scream in agony?
--But I won't.
You make me love you when you imitate me
With little squeaking noises of happiness
And affection.
You know I'm a pushover for the sweets in life.

****

Madonna Clarke

ADDICTIONS

My addictions are not
of the normal genre.
It's not the lust of
alcohol or the intensity
of drugs. Devotion it
is to the realities I
have created to which
others have dissipated.
Surrendering my soul
to delve into the
subjects others feel
apprehensive of. An oddity
perhaps to some, who
cannot understand or
feel. Reaching into the
back of my brain for
those little things which
have become living nightmares.

****

Joel Stepanek

NO OTHER YEAR QUITE LIKE IT

JANUARY 1986

NO OTHER YEAR QUITE LIKE IT

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
				1 WELCOME TO JANUARY. PLEASE HOLD ON TO ALL LOOSE ARTICLES AS WE CANNOT BE RESPONSIBLE FOR ANYTHING LOST OR BROKEN	2 HASSLE YOUR HAMSTER	3 MARSHALL BEAUDEAN DAY AMAZE YOUR FRIENDS
4 THE DAY OF CREME SODA	5 GIVE YOUR HAMSTER A BATH HE LOOKS DIRTY	6 EVERYONE KNOWS SLEEP CAUSES CANCER	7 MOOD RING DAY	8 NATIONAL BAD DAY IN AMERICA NOT A GOOD DAY	9 ATTACK OF THE KILLER, BUGEYED, MUTANT, GOLDFISH FROM HELL DAY BE PREPARED...	10 YOUR HAMSTER HASN'T MOVED SINCE MONDAY 'BOUT TIME TO FEED THE SUCKER
11 WALK ACROSS AMERICA FOR THE SAFETY AND PRESERVATION OF GUPPIES SPONSORED BY: NAPA AUTOPARTS	12 THE FOOD ISN'T HELPING BETTER CONSULT THE HELPFUL AND INFORMATIVE HAMSTER MANUAL	13 WICKER IS IN THIS YEAR	14 NATIONAL RED M&M DAY FOR THE RESTORATION AND PRESERVATION OF RED M&M'S	15 IT SEEMED LIKE A GOOD THING TO DO AT THE TIME	16 HAMSTER HASN'T MOVED SINCE THE FIFTH BETTER GET OUT THE GRILL BEFORE HE LOSES TO MUCH WEIGHT	17 HAMSTER FEAST INVITE YOUR FRIENDS
18 SELFISH WEEK SPONSORED BY: VENTURE AND VIDEO VIBES	19 BE A PIG DAY GO AHEAD, BUY THE LAST PACK OF CHOCOLATE DONUTS AT THE COUNTER	20 DO THIS TODAY: DRINK OUT OF THE MILK CARTON	21 SELFISH WEEK PARADE LIVE SATELLITE COVERAGE FROM BRAIDWOOD, IL ON CHANNEL 60	22 DRINK ALL THE COLD WATER AT A DRINKING FOUNTAIN	23 TAKE 12 ITEMS INTO A 10 ITEMS OR LESS LANE AND WRITE A CHECK	24 LAST DAY TO BE SELFISH BETTER STEAL A SEAT FROM AN OLD LADY ON THE CITY BUS
25 BURP HAMSTER REMEMBERENCE DAY	26 RONCO POCKET FISHERMAN DAY	27 THIS DAY LEFT INTENTIONALY BLANK	28 TIME TO GET A NEW PET	29 NO REPEAT THURSDAY THIS THURSDAY WILL NEVER BE REPEATED	30 SON OF THE ATTACK OF THE KILLER, BUGEYED, MUTANT GOLDFISH FROM HELL DAY BEWARE!	31 WE HOPE YOU HAVE ENJOYED YOUR TRIP THROUGH JANUARY. PLEASE WATCH YOUR STEP AS WE GO INTO FEBRUARY

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W. A. Kahle

SUMMING UP

Deep in a crowd
one soul spies
on the lights and voices
chanting with a fanatic speaker.
Wave your hands--
Twist your elbow--
Jump and scream,
Live a riotous dream: hedonize.
Nothing makes sense
but if the people inside
papier mache bodies
sorted out the lies from truth
not a fire would flare
on the channel five news
Iran might change their mind
or arsonists would set
the blowtorch aside
for an unbiased opinion
of how
the nation could accomplish
senility so fast.

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ZZZZZ
WORKATER
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